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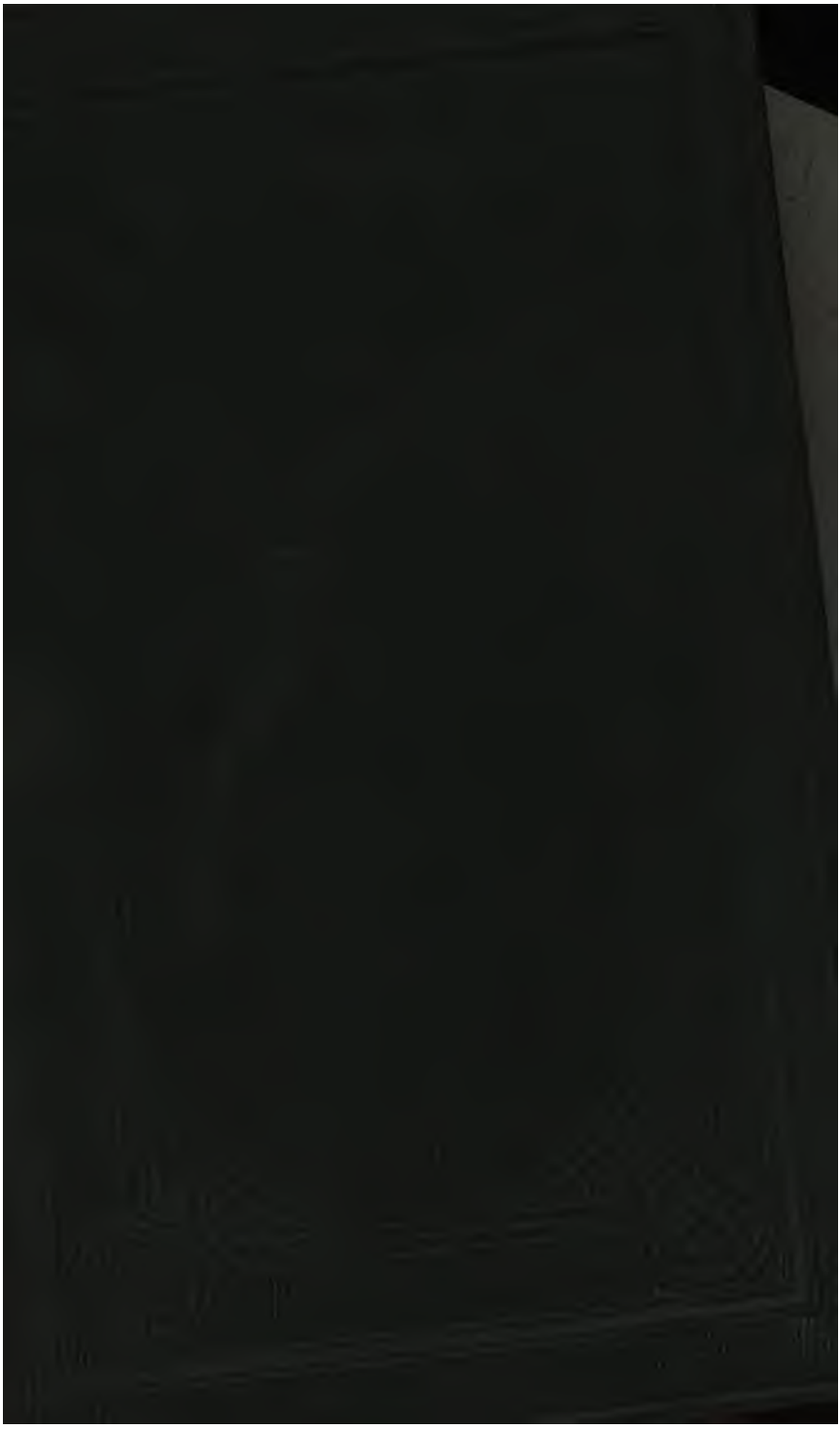

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MARKET HARBOROUGH.

MARKET HARBOROUGH;

OR,

HOW MR. SAWYER WENT TO THE SHIRES.

"Fain would I leap, but that I fear to fall;
If thy heart fail thee, do not leap at all."

250. b. 78.

LONDON:
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Dedication.

TO

THE FIRST FLIGHT IN ALL COUNTRIES,

THE SELECT FEW,

WHO, IN DEFIANCE OF DIRT, DANGER, AND DISCOMFORT,

WHEN THE HOUNDS RUN, *WILL* BE WITH THEM,

The following Sketch

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY THEIR HUMBLE ADMIRER,

THE AUTHOR.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—ONE OF THE "OLD SORT"	1
II.—"MR. JOB SLOPER"	17
III.—"YOUR HANDWRITING, SIR"	24
IV.—MARCHING ORDERS	36
V.—"BOOTS AND SADDLES"	48
VI.—HAZY WEATHER	65
VII.—A LEICESTERSHIRE LARK	73
VIII.—A DOVE OF THE SAME	86
IX.—FOUR O'CLOCK, STABLES	97
X.—"HAIL! SMILING MORN!"	109
XI.—"A MERRY GO-ROUNDER"	122
XII.—"DEAD FOR A DUCAT"	133
XIII.—"AFTER DARK"	151
XIV.—"BEFORE THE DAWN"	166
XV.—TAKING A HINT	174
XVI.—RIDING TO SELL	183

PAGE

CHAPTER XVII.—"TEMPTED TO BUY" . . . 201

XVIII.—THE DOVE-COTE 214

XIX.—"THE BOOT ON THE OTHER LEG" . 229

XX.—DEEPER AND DEEPER 237

XXI.—THE MAGNUM BONUM . . . 247

XXII.—A WET NIGHT 256

XXIII.—DOUGHTY DEEDS 274

XXIV.—THE BALL 281

XXV.—THE RACE 296

XXVI.—THE MATCH 307

MARKET HARBOROUGH;

OR,

HOW MR. SAWYER WENT TO THE SHIRES.

CHAPTER I.

ONE OF THE "OLD SORT."

Most men have a sunny spot to which they look back in their existence, as most have an impossible future, to attain which all their energies are exerted, and their resources employed. The difference between these visionary scenes is this, that they *think* a good deal of the latter, but *talk* a good deal of the former.

With some fellows the golden age seems to have been passed at Eton, with others at the Universities. Here a quiet, mild clergyman gloats over the roystering days he spent as a Cornet in the Hussars; there an obese old gentleman prates of the fascinations of London and his own successes as a slim young dandy

about town. Everybody believes he liked that rosy past better than he did. Just as we fancy that the hounds never run now-a-days as they used, when we had lungs to holloa and nerves to ride; and that even if they could go the same pace, hunters are not now to be got of the stamp of our old chesnut horse, concerning whose performances we think no shame to lie, year by year, with increasing audacity; there is nobody left to contradict us, and why should we not?

Now, Mr. Sawyer, too, will descend into the vale of years, with a landmark on which to fix his failing eyes, an era which shall serve as a date for his reminiscence, and a starting point for his after-dinner yarns. This shall be the season when Mr. Sawyer went to the Shires. It is not yet very long ago. Perhaps it may be well to relate a few of his adventures and doings in those localities ere they lapse into the realms of fiction under the romantic colouring with which he will himself begin to paint them, when their actual freshness has worn off.

Touching Mr. Sawyer's early history, I have collected but few particulars, not enjoying the advantage of that gentleman's acquaintance till he had arrived at years of maturity. I gather, however, that he matriculated at Oxford, and

was rusticated from that pleasant University for some breach of college discipline, sufficiently venial in itself, but imbued with a scarlet tinge in the eyes of the authorities. I have heard that he rode an Ayrshire bull across Peckwater in broad day-light, having previously attired himself in a red coat, with leathers, &c., complete, and clad the patient animal in a full suit of academicals. Also that he endeavoured to mollify his judges by apostrophizing the partner of his trespass, in the words Horace puts into the mouth of Europa,

"Si quis infamem mihi nunc juvencum;"

and so on to the end of the stanza. As, although Mr. Sawyer's fluency in all Saxon expletives is undeniable, I never heard him make use of any language but his own, I confess to my mind this story bears upon the face of it the stamp of improbability, and that perversion of the truth from which Oxonian annals are not entirely free.

It is a good old fashion to commence a narrative by a personal description of its hero; such as you would see in the *Hue and Cry*, or the advertisements for that missing gentleman in the *Times* who has never been found yet, and whose humble costume of half-boots, tweed

trowsers, and an olive surtout, with a bunch of keys and three-halfpence in the pockets, denotes neither affluence nor display. Upon this principle let me endeavour to bring before the mind's eye of my readers the outward semblance of my worthy friend, John Standish Sawyer, a man of mark, forsooth, in his own parish, and "a justice of peace in his county, simple though he stand here."

Mr. Sawyer is a well-built able-bodied personage, standing five feet eight in the worsted stockings he usually affects, with a frame admirably calculated to resist fatigue, to perform feats of strength rather than agility, and to put on beef: the last tendency he keeps down with constant and severe exercise, so that the twelve stone which he swings into his saddle is seldom exceeded by a pound. "As long as I ride thirteen stone," quoth Mr. Sawyer to his intimates after dinner, "no man alive can take the shine out of me, over a country. Mason! Mason's all very well for a *spurt!* but where is he at the end of two hours and forty minutes, through woodlands, in deep clay? Answer me that! and pass the bottle."

Our friend's admirers term his person square: his enemies, and he has a few, call it "clumsy:" certainly his hands and feet are large, his limbs

robust, but not well-turned; and though it would make him very angry to hear me, I confess his is not my *beau ideal* of the figure for a horseman. Nevertheless, he has an honest English face, round and rosy, light-grey eyes, such as usually belong to an energetic and persevering temperament, with thin sandy hair, and a good deal of stiff red whisker.

Altogether, he looks like a man you would rather drink with, than fight with, any day. Perhaps, if very fastidious, you might prefer letting him alone, to doing either. Of his costume, I shall only say that it partakes on every-day occasions of the *decidedly* sporting, with a slight tendency towards the *slang*. Its details are those of a dress in which the owner is ready to get on horseback at a moment's notice; nay, in which he is qualified, without further preparation, to ride four miles straight-on-end, over a stiff country; so enduring are its materials, and so suggestive of equestrian exercise is its general fit. Also, on Sundays, as on week-days, in town or country, he delights in a "five to two" sort of hat, with the flat brim and backward set, which denote indisputable knowledge of horse-flesh, and a sagacity that almost amounts to dishonesty.

Not that Mr. Sawyer ever bets; far from it.

He elbows his way indeed into the ring, and criticises the two-year-olds as they walk jauntily down to the starting-post, as if he speculated like the Leviathan, and owned a *string* like Sir Joseph Hawley's; but all this is simply *ex-officio*. Wherever horses are concerned, Mr. Sawyer deems it incumbent on him to make a demonstration, and he goes to Tattersall's as regularly on the Sunday afternoons in the summer, as you and I do to dinner. Like the Roman Emperor, the horse is his high priest, and the object of his idolatry.

I am afraid hunting is going down hill. I do not mean to say that there is not an ever-increasing supply of ambitious gentlemen who order coats from Poole, boots from Bartley, and horses from Mason to display the same wherever they think they are most likely to be admired; but I think there are few specimens left of the old hunting sort, who devoted themselves exclusively to their favourite pursuit, and could not even bear to hear it mentioned with anything like levity or disrespect; men whose only claim to social distinction was that they *hunted*, who looked upon their red coat as a passport to all the society they cared to have, and who divided the whole community, in their own minds, into two classes—"men who hunt," and "men who don't."

In these days people have so many irons in the fire! Look at even the *first* flight, with a crack pack of hounds; ten to one amongst the half-a-dozen who compose it you will find a soldier, a statesman, a poet, a painter, or a Master in Chancery, whilst "maddening in the rear" through the gates come a posse of authors, actors, amateurs, artists, of every description, till you think of Juvenal's stinging lines, and his Protean Greek, who was

> "Grammaticus, rhetor, geometres, pictor, aliptes,
> Augur, schœnobates, medicus, magus," &c.,

and vote a fox-hunter the conglomeration of all these different accomplishments.

But Mr. Sawyer did not trouble himself much about Juvenal or his opinions. Finding his classical career a failure, and, what was more disappointing, his anticipated season with Mr. Drake cut short in consequence of his misadventure with the bull, he gave up the little reading which he had been compelled to take in hand, and confined his studies exclusively to *Bell's Life*, *The Field*, with its questions and answers to correspondents, suggestive alike of inventive ingenuity as of exhaustive research, and the "Sporting Magazine." The fact is, what with hunting three and four times a-week,

talking of it the remaining days, and thinking of it all the seven, with constant visits to the stable and a perpetual feud with his blacksmith, Mr. Sawyer's mind was completely filled with as much as that receptacle could be thought capable of containing.

My hero, like the champions of the Round Table, is perhaps seen to the greatest advantage on horse-back. Let me introduce him to my reader, riding tike a knight through the wilds of Lyonnesse, up a deep muddy lane, as he returns from hunting in the dull November twilight.

"Capital bit of stuff," says Mr. Sawyer, knocking off the ashes of his cigar with his dog-skin clad finger, and apostrophizing his "mount," a very little grey horse, with an arched neck and light mouth, and a tail set on high on his quarters. "Capital bit of stuff," he repeats, dangling his feet out of the stirrups; "as game as a pebble, and as neat as a pink." "Two hundred—two hundred and fifty! Your'e worth two hundred and fifty, every shilling of it" (he had bought him of a fishmonger for forty pounds and a broken winded pony). "Worth as much as any horse *can* be to carry thirteen stone. Hang it; you'd *fetch* all the money at Tatter-

sall's if any of *the customers* could only have seen you go to-day!"

Then Mr. Sawyer placed his feet in the stirrups, and fell to thinking of his day's sport.

They had really had a good run—a fine, wild, old-fashioned fox-hunting sort of run—from two hundred acres of woodland, down a couple of miles of bottomless ravine, and away over deep stiff ploughs and frequent straggling fences, till they reached the far-stretching Downs. Here their fox had made his point good up-wind, and the pace even of those square-headed, deep-ribbed, heavy-timbered hounds had been liberal enough to satisfy the most exacting. Mr. Sawyer remembered, with a glow of pride, how, when they descended into the low country once more, he had led the field, and jumped an awkward stile, into a lane, to the admiration of all beholders. He could *ride*, to give him his due; and, moreover, he knew what hounds were doing, and was familiar with the country. Therefore he had slipped away with them, when the pack, after three or four turns round the huge woodland, had forced their fox into the open; therefore he had kept on the down-wind side of the ravine aforesaid, and therefore he had been fortunate enough to see the fox handsomely run into, in an old double hedge-row, after an

hour and forty minutes, during which he had unquestionably "gone best" from end to end. The huntsman said so—a wary ancient, who, never showing in front at any period, or running the slightest risks in the way of pace or fencing, had a huntsman's peculiar knack of turning up when he was wanted, particularly towards the finish. The doctor said so—an old rival, whose high character for riding entitled him to be generous; and the fishmonger, previous possessor of the grey, loudly affirmed, with many oaths which it is unnecessary to repeat, that "Muster Sawyer always was a hout-and-houter, and had gone audacious!" Contrary to custom, none of the rest of the field had been near enough to give an opinion, though excuses as usual were rife for non-appearance. To judge from his own account, no man ever misses a run, save by a concatenation of circumstances totally unprecedented. Besides every normal casualty, he would always seem to have been baffled throughout by an opposing fiend of remarkable perseverance and diabolical ingenuity.

As the sun went down in a deep crimson segment, like the glow of a ruby, or the danger-signal on a railway, Mr. Sawyer lit a fresh cigar, and began to ponder on the merits of his own

riding and the capabilities of his stud. As the daylight waned, and the grey-ash of his "choice Laranaga" (seven-and-forty shillings the pound) grew longer and longer, he began to think so much talent was quite wasted in "the provinces"—that he was capable of better things than "showing the way" to the half-dozen of red-coats and couple of farmers, who constituted his usual "gallery"—that he was too good for the Old Country, as its sportsmen affectionately designate that picturesque locality in which they follow the chase—and that he was bound to do himself and the little grey horse justice by visiting the wide pastures, the prairie-like grazing ground of the crack countries; to use his own vernacular, that he ought to "cut the whole concern for a season, and have a turn at the Shires." His cogitations took some such form as the following: "Here am I, still on the sunny side of forty—in the prime of my life, of my pluck, of my strength, and—ahem!—of my appearance — none so dusty neither, on horse-back, whatever Miss Mexico may think, with her olive skin and her stuck-up airs. After all, I don't know that I'd have had her, though she *was* a thirty-thousand pounder! I don't like 'em touched with the tar-brush. I'm all for the thoro'-bred ones — women, as well as horses.

Well, here I am, wasting my life in these deserted ploughs. Even if we do get a run, such as we had to-day, I have no one to talk to about it. The Grange is a crafty crib enough, and I'm as comfortable there as a bachelor need to be; but I can't go home, night after night, to bolt my dinner by myself, smoke by myself to digest it, and go to bed at ten o'clock, because I'm so bored with John Sawyer, and it's the only way to get rid of him. No, hang it! I'll emigrate; I'll go and *hibernate* in the grass. I'll make Isaac a stud-groom; I'll buy a couple more nags, the right sort too — show those dandyfied chaps how to *ride*, and perhaps sell the lot for a hatful of money at the end of the season, and have all my fun for nothing." Deluded man! how feasible the latter project sounds—how difficult to realise!

The idea once having taken possession of our friend's mind, soon found itself cramped for room in that somewhat circumscribed area. All dinner-time he was absent and pre-occupied; even Scotch broth, a beef-steak pudding, a damson tart, and toasted cheese did not tend to settle him. Two of the Laranagas were converted into smoke and ashes before he could come to anything like a definite conclusion. Though a temperate man habitually (for the

sake of his nerves), he rang for the old brandy labelled V.O.P., and mixed himself a real stiff one, with boiling water and one lump of sugar. I have my suspicions that his final decision was partly its result. The great difficulty was where to go. A man of limited acquaintance and reserved manners has at least this advantage—that all parts of England are equally attractive as regards society. Then he had hunted too much to believe newspaper accounts of sport, so that looking up the old files of *Bell's Life* assisted him no whit to a conclusion; also being of an inquiring turn of mind, wherever fox-hunting was concerned, he had amassed such a quantity of information concerning the "flying countries," that it took him a considerable time and another glass of brandy-and-water to digest and classify his facts. Altogether it was a complicated and puzzling question. First he thought of Leamington and the Warwickshire North and South, with regular attendance on the Atherstone and one field-day per week with the Pytchley; but many considerations combined to render the Spa ineligible as his head-quarters. In the first place, the evening gaieties made his hair stand on end. Since his rejection by Miss Mexico, Sawyer was no dancing-man; and indeed even in the first flush of his courtship he

was seen to less advantage in a white neck-cloth than a blue bird's eye. Some men's hands and feet are not made to fit boots and gloves as constructed by our neighbour the fiery Gaul, and for such it is wise to abstain from "the mazy," and to rest their hopes of success on other and more sterling qualities than the vapid demeanour and cool assurance which triumph in a ball-room. Then, with all his fondness for the applause of his fellow-creatures, he did not quite fancy making *one* of that crowd of irregular-horse who appear on a Wednesday at Crick or Misterton, to the unspeakable dismay of the Pytchley *lady* pack, who, if there is anything *like* a scent, scour away from them as if for their very lives; and although it is doubtless a high compliment that two hundred gentlemen in scarlet should patronize the same establishment, Mr. Sawyer thought that as far as *he* was concerned, the number might as well stop at one hundred-and-ninety-nine.

I believe, however, that the dread of those wide and fathomless rivers which are constantly jumped, in Warwickshire, by at least *one* amphibious sportsman out of a daring field, and of which the width from bank to bank, according to the newspapers, is seldom less than seven-and-twenty or more than seven-and-thirty feet,

was what principally terrified our friend. Accustomed to a leading championship at home, he shrank from such aquatic rivalry, and resolved that, with all its fascinations, Warwickshire at least should not have the benefit of his patronage.

Once, after a steaming gulp of the stimulating fluid, the idea of Melton flashed across his mind, but it was dismissed as soon as entertained. "I'm not such a fool as I look," quoth Mr. Sawyer; "and I don't mean to keep eight hunters and a couple of hacks to meet a set of fellows every day, who won't condescend to notice me unless I do as they do. Whist and dry champagne, and off to London at the first appearance of frost; ride like a butcher all day, risking twice as much neck as I do here, and then come out 'quite the lady' at dinner-time, and choke in a white tie, acting the part of a walking gentleman all the evening. No! Melton won't suit my book at any price. Besides, I'd never sell my horses there; they order their hunters down from London just as they do their 'baccy' and their breeches." So the idea of Melton was dismissed; and a vision of Oakham, or Uppingham, or even Billesdon rose in its stead. He could not quite get those tempting pastures, with their sunny slopes and flying

fences, out of his head. The same objection, however, applied to the last-mentioned places that drove him from home, viz., the want of society. That deficiency seemed to threaten him wherever he set up his staff. At Wansford he would be as solitary as in the Old Country; also he would be farther from High Leicestershire than he liked. The same drawback was attached to Lutterworth, and Rugby, and Northampton. It was not till the third glass that the inspiration seized him. Dashing the end of his cigar under the grate, he rose from his easy chair, stuck his hands in his pockets and his back to the waning fire, stamped thrice on the hearthrug, like a necromancer summoning his familiar, and exclaimed aloud, "The very place! I wonder I never thought of it before. Strike me ugly, if I won't go to Market Harborough!"

Then he finished his brandy-and-water at a gulp, lit his candle, and tumbled up to bed, where he dreamed he was riding a rocking-horse over the Skeffington Lordship, with no one in the same field with him but the late Mr. William Scott, the vehemence of whose language was in exact proportion to the strength of the beverage which had constituted his own night-cap.

CHAPTER II.

"MR. JOB SLOPER."

THE ancient Persians, who seem also to have been wonderful fellows to ride, had a pleasing system of deliberation, which has somewhat fallen into disuse in our modern Parliaments. According to the old historians, it was their practice to discuss all graver matters of policy when in a state of inebriety, giving their debate the advantage of being resumed and repeated next morning; also, should they inadvertently convene a meeting when sober, to reverse the process, and ascertain whether on getting drunk over it they arrived at the same result. The system was not without its merits no doubt, one of the most prominent of which seems to have been that it entailed a double allowance of liquor. Mr. Sawyer was sufficiently a Persian to reconsider his decision of the previous night, when he woke next morning with a trifling head-ache, and a tongue more like that of the rein-deer, as preserved by Fortnum and Mason,

than the organ of speech and deglutition peculiar to the human subject.

He was a hard fellow enough; but no man can smoke cigars and drink hot-stopping the last thing at night, and get up in the morning without remembering that he has done so.

A plunge into his cold bath, however, a cup of warm tea, with a rasher of bacon frizzling from the fire, and well peppered, soon restored the brightness to our friend's eye and the colour to his cheek. When he lit his cigar on his own well-cleaned door-step, and turned his face to the balmy breath of "jocund day," under a soft November sky, dappled, and mellowed, and tinged here and there with gold by the winter sun, he felt, as he expressed it, "fit as a fiddle, and hotter upon Market Harborough than ever."

He was a man of few words though, when he meant business, and only pausing for a moment at the Stable, and feeling the grey's legs, which somehow always *did* fill after a day's hunting, he took no living mortal into his confidence, not even the taciturn Isaac (of whom more hereafter); but started for a five-mile walk, to inspect the stables of a certain horse-coping worthy, with whom he had long been too well acquainted, and who generally had a good bit

of stuff somewhere about the premises, provided only you could get hold of the right one.

Mr. Sawyer was not a man to order a horse out of the stable in the hunting season for any but the legitimate purpose of the chase. "Walking," he said, "kept him in wind;" and off he started down a narrow lane that in summer was thick with blackberries and blooming with dog-roses, and over a stile and across a fallow, and through a wood, at an honest five-mile-an-hour, heel-and-toe; every turn in the path reminding him, as he stepped along, of some feat of horsemanship or skilful shot, or other pleasing association connected with his country home. And this is one of the greatest advantages of hunting *from* home. After all, notwithstanding her irresistible attractions, we cannot follow Diana every day of our lives, and surely it is wiser and pleasanter to take her as we want her amongst our own woods and glades, and breezy uplands, and pleasant shady nooks, than to go all the way to Ephesus on purpose to worship with the crowd. Mixed motives, however, seem to be the springs that set in motion our human frames; and if Care sits behind the horseman on the cantle of his saddle, Ambition may also be detected clinging somewhere about his spurs.

In little more than an hour Mr. Sawyer found himself entering a dilapidated farm-yard, of which three sides consisted of tumble-down sheds and out-houses; while the fourth, in somewhat better repair, denoted by its ventilating windows, latched doors, and occasional stable-buckets that its inmates were of the equine race. Stamping up a bricked passage, on either side of which sundry plants were dying in about three inches of mould, our friend wisely entered the open door of the kitchen, preferring that easy ingress to the adjacent portal, of which a low scraper and rusty knocker seemed to point out that it was chiefly intended for visits of ceremony. Here he encountered nothing more formidable than a white cat sleeping by the fire, and a Dutch clock, with an enormous countenance, ticking drowsily in the warmest corner of the apartment.

Coughing loudly, and shuffling his feet against the sanded floor, he soon succeeded in summoning a bare-armed maid-of-all-work, with a dirty face and flaunting ribbons in her cap, who, to his inquiries whether "Mr. Sloper was at home?" answered, as maids-of-all-work invariably do, that "Master had just stepped out for a minute, but left word he would

be back directly: would you please to take a seat?"

This interval, our friend, who, as he often remarked, "wasn't born yesterday," determined to spend in a private visit to the stables, and left the kitchen accordingly for that purpose. It is needless to observe that he had barely coasted a third of the ocean of muck which constituted the centre of the yard, ere he encountered the proprietor himself coming leisurely to greet him, with a welcome on his ruddy face and a straw in his mouth.

Mr. Sloper was a hale hearty man, of some three-score years or so, who must have been very good-looking in his prime; but whose countenance, from the combined effects of good-living and hard weather, had acquired that mottled crimson tinge, which, according to Dickens, is seldom observed except in under-done boiled beef and the faces of old mail coachmen and guards. It would have puzzled a physiognomist to say whether good-humour or cunning prevailed in the twinkle of his bright little blue eye; but the way in which he wore his shaved hat and stuck his hands into the pockets of his wide-skirted grey riding coat, would have warned any observer of human nature that he was skilled in horseflesh

and versed in all the secrets that lend their interest to that fascinating animal. Somehow Honesty seems to go faster on horseback than a-foot.

Not that a man of Mr. Sloper's years and weight ever got upon the backs of his purchases, save perhaps in very extreme cases, and where "the lie with circumstances" was as indispensable as "the lie direct." No, he confined himself to dealing for them over dark-coloured glasses of brandy-and-water, puffing them unconscionably in the stable, and pretending to ignore them completely when he met his own property out-of-doors. "His eye-sight," he said, "was failing him; positively he didn't know his own nags now, when he met them in his neighbour's field!"

Tradition asserted, however, that Job Sloper, when a younger man, had been one of the best and boldest riders in the old country. The limp which affected his walk had been earned in a rattling fall over a turnpike-gate for a small wager of a new hat, and Fiction herself panted in detailing his many exploits by flood and field when he first went into the trade. These had lost nothing by time and repetition, but even now, in those exceptional cases where he condescended to get into the saddle, there was

no question that the old man could put them along still; for, as lusty and heavy as he'd grown, "I'm a sad cripple now, sir," he'd say, in a mild reflective voice; "and they wants to be very quiet and gentle for me. I never had not what I call good nerve in the best of times, though I liked to see the hounds run a bit too. I was always fond of the sport, you see; and even now it does me good to watch a gent like yourself in the saddle. What I calls a *reel* 'orseman—as can give-an'-take, and bend his back like Old Sir 'Arry; him as kept our hounds for so long. If it ain't taking too great a liberty, perhaps you're related to Sir 'Arry: you puts me in mind of him so much, the way you carries your 'ands!"

The old hypocrite! Ingenuous youth was pretty sure to "stop and have a bit of lunch" after that, and after lunch was it not human nature that it should buy?

CHAPTER III.

"YOUR HAND-WRITING, SIR."

"MORNIN', sir," says Mr. Sloper, scenting a customer as he accosts his guest. "Oh, it's you, is it, Mr. Sawyer? Won't ye step in and set down after your walk? Take a glass of mild ale and a crust of bread-and-cheese, or a drop of sherry or anythink?"

"No hunting to-day, Job," answers the visitor, declining the refreshment; "so I just toddled over to see how you're getting on, and have a look round the stables; no harm in looking, you know."

Mr. Sloper's face assumes an expression of profound mystery. "I'm glad you come over to-day, sir," he says, in a tone of confidential frankness, "of all days in the year. I've a 'orse here, as I should like to ast your opinion about—a gent like *you* as knows what a 'unter really is. And so you should, Mr. Sawyer, for there's no man alive takes greater liberties with en when they *can* go and do it. And I've got

one in that box, as *I* think, just *is* more than curious."

"Would he carry *me?*" asks Mr. Sawyer, with well-affected indifference, as if he had not come over expressly to find one that would. "Not that I *want* a horse, you know; but if I saw one I liked very much, and you didn't price him too high, why I *might* be induced to buy against next season, perhaps."

Job took his hands out of his coat-pockets, and spread them abroad, as it were to dry. The action denoted extreme purity and candour.

"No; I don't think as he ought to carry *you*, sir," was the unexpected reply. "Now, I ain't a-going to tell you a lie, Mr. Sawyer. This horse didn't *ought* to be ridden, not the way *you* take and ride them, Mr. Sawyer; leastways not over such a blind heart-breaking country as this here. He's too good, he is, for that kind of work; he ought to be in Leicestershire, *he* ought; the Harborough country, that's the country for him. He's too fast for *us*, and that's the truth. Only, to be sure, we have a vast of plough hereabouts, and *I* never see such a sticker through dirt. It makes no odds to him pasture *or* plough, and the sweetest hack ever I clapped eyes on besides. However, you shall judge for yourself, Mr. Sawyer. I won't ask you to believe *me*.

You've a quicker eye to a horse than I have, by a long chalk, and I'd sooner have your opinion than my own. I *would* now, and that's the truth!"

Our purchaser began to think he might possibly have hit upon *the* animal at last. Often as he had been at the game, and often as he had been disappointed, he was still sanguine enough to believe he might draw the prize-ticket in the lottery at any time. As I imagine every man who pulls on his boots to go out hunting has a sort of vague hope that to-day may be his day of triumph with the hounds, so the oldest and wariest of us cannot go into a dealer's yard without a sort of half-conscious idea that there *must* be a trump card somewhere in the pack, and it *may* be our luck to hold it as well as another's.

But Sloper, like the rest of his trade, was not going to show his game first. It seems to be a maxim with all salesmen to prove their customers with inferior articles before they come to the real thing. Mr. Sawyer had to walk through a four-stall stable, and inspect, preparatory to declining, a mealy bay cob, a lame grey, a broken-winded chesnut, and an enormous brown animal, very tall, very narrow, very ugly, with extremely upright forelegs and shoulders to match. The

latter his owner affirmed to be "*an extraordinary shaped un,*" as no doubt he was. A little playful *badinage* on the merits of this last enlivened the visit.

"What will you take for the brown, Sloper, if I buy him at so much the foot?" said the customer, as they emerged into the fresh air.

"Say ten pound a foot, sir?" answered Job, with the utmost gravity, "and ten over, because *he always has a foot to spare.* Come now, Mr. Sawyer, I can afford to let a good customer like you have that horse for *fefty.* *Fefty* guineas, or even *pounds,* sir, to *you.* I got him in a bad debt, you see, sir. It's Bible truth I'm telling ye; and he only stood *me* in forty-seven pounds ten, *and* a sov. I gave the man as brought him over. He's not everybody's horse, Mr. Sawyer, that isn't; but I think he'll carry *you* remarkably well."

"I don't think I'll ever give him a chance," was the rejoinder. "Come, Job, we're burning daylight; let's go and have a look at the crack."

One individual had been listening to the above conversation with thrilling interest. This was no less a personage than Barney, Mr. Sloper's head groom, general factotum and rough-rider in ordinary—an official whose business it was to ride anything *at* anything, for anybody who

asked him. He was a little old man, with one eye, a red handkerchief, and the general appearance of a post-boy on half-pay; a sober fellow, too, and as brave as King Richard; yet had he expressed himself strongly about this said brown horse, the previous evening, to the maid-of-all-work. "He's the wussest we've had yet," was his fiat. "It's nateral for 'em to fall; but when *he* falls, he's all over a chap till he's crumpled him." So his heroic heart beat more freely when they adjourned to the neighbouring box.

Mr. Sloper threw the door open with an air. It must be confessed he seldom had one that would bear, without preparation, a minute inspection from the eye of a sportsman; but he knew *this* was a sound one, and made the most of it. Clothed and hooded, littered to the hocks, and sheeted to the tail, there was yet something about his general appearance that fascinated Mr. Sawyer at once. Job saw the spell was working, and abstained from disturbing it. As far as could be seen, the animal was a long, low, well-bred looking roan, with short flat legs, large clean hocks, and swelling muscular thighs. His supple skin threw off a bloom, as if he was in first-rate condition; and when, laying his ears back and biting the manger, he lifted a foreleg, as it were, to expostulate with his visitors, the hoof was

round, open, and well-developed, as blue, and to all appearance as hard, as a flint.

"Has he *fashion* enough, think ye, sir?" asked Job, at length, breaking the silence. "Strip him, Barney," he added, taking the straw from his mouth.

The roan winced, and stamped, and whisked his tail, and set his back up during the process; but when it was concluded, Mr. Sawyer could not but confess to himself, that if he was only as good as he *looked*, he would *do*."

"Feel his legs, Mr. Sawyer!" observed the dealer, turning away to conceal the triumph that *would* ooze out.. "There's some legs—there's some hocks and thighs! Talk of loins, and look where his tail's set on. Carries his *own* head, too; and *if* you could see his manners! I never saw such manners in the hunting-field. Six-year-old—not a speck or blemish; bold as a bull, and gentle as a lady; he can go as fast as you can clap your hands, and stay till the middle of the week after next—jump a town, too, and never turn his head from the place you put him at. As handy as a fiddle, as neat as a pink, and worth all the money to carry in your eye when you go out to buy hunters. But what's the use of talking about it to a judge like you? Lay your leg over him—only just lay your leg

over him, Mr. Sawyer. I don't want you to buy him ! but get on him and feel his action, just as a favour to *me.*"

Our friend had made up his mind he would do so from the first. There was no mistaking the appearance of the animal ; so good was it, that he had but two misgivings—some rank unsoundness, to account for its being there, or so high a price as to be beyond his means ; for Mr. Sawyer was too fond of the sport to give a sum that he could not replace for so perishable an article as a hunter.

He was no mean equestrian ,our friend, and quite at home on a strange horse. As he drew the curb-rein gently through his fingers, the roan dropped his long lean head, and champed the bit playfully, tossing a speck of froth back on his rider's boots.

" You've got a mouth at any rate," quoth Mr. Sawyer, and trotted him gently down the hard road, the animal stepping freely and gaily under him, full of life and spirits. The customer liked his mount, and couldn't help showing it. " May I lark him ? " said he, pulling up after a short canter to and fro on the turf by the wayside ; during which Job Sloper had been exercising his mental arithmetic in what we may term a sum of problematical addition.

" Take him into the close, sir," was the generous reply ; " put him at anything you like. If you can get him into one of these fences, I'll *give* him to you ! "

So Mr. Sawyer sat down to jump a low hedge and ditch, then stood up, and caught hold of the roan's head, and sent him a cracker through the adjoining plough, and across a larger fence into a pasture, and back again over a fair flight of rails and lost his flat shooting-hat, and rucked his plaid trousers up to his knees ; and Sloper marked his kindling eye and glowing cheek, and knew that he had *landed* him.

" Walk him about for ten minutes before you do him over," said that worthy to Barney, as Mr. Sawyer dismounted, and the latter brought him his hat. " And now, sir," added the hospitable dealer, " you can't go away without tasting my cheese—the same you liked last time, you know. Walk in, sir ; this way, and mind the step, if *you* please." So speaking, Mr. Sloper ushered his guest into a neat little parlour with a strong odour of preserved tobacco-smoke, where a clean cloth set off a nice luncheon of bread and cheese, flanked by a foaming jug of strong ale and a decanter of oily-brown sherry.

And herein the dealer showed his knowledge of human nature, and his discrimination in the

different characteristics of the species. Had his guest been some generous scion of the aristocracy, with more money than nerves, he would have *primed* him first, and put him up to ride afterwards. But he knew his man. He was well aware that Mr. Sawyer required no stimulant to make him jump, but a strong one to induce him to part with his money; so he proposed the luncheon after he was satisfied that his customer was pleased with his mount.

Neither of them touched on business during the meal, the conversation consisting chiefly of the runs that had lately taken place in the old country, with many an inferred compliment to the good riding of the possible purchaser. Then Mr. Sawyer, produced the *Laranagas* and offered one to Job, who bit it, and wet it, and smoked it, as men do who are more used to clay pipes, and then they went back to the stable to see the roan done up.

The gallop and the ale were working in Mr. Sawyer's brain, but he didn't see his way into the roan at a hundred; so he obstinately held his tongue. The dealer was obliged to break the ice.

"I'd take it very friendly of you, sir, if you'd give me your honest opinion of that horse," said he, waving the *Laranaga* towards the animal.

"I fancy he's too good for our country; and I've a brother-in-law down in Rutland as wants to have him very bad. He's just the cut, so he says, for these Melton gents; and he's a good judge, is my brother-in-law, and a pretty rider to boot. He'd give me my price, too; but then, you know, sir, askin' your pardon, it isn't always ready money between relations; and that cuts the other way again, as a man may say. What do *you* think, Mr. Sawyer?"

"I'll find out what he wants for him at any rate," thought the customer. "What's his figure?" was the abrupt rejoinder.

Mr. Sloper hesitated. "A hundred and—" *eighty*, he was going to say; but seeing his customer's eye resting on the roan's back-ribs —a point in which the horse was somewhat deficient—he dropped at once to seventy, and regretted it the next moment when he caught the expression of the listener's face.

"It isn't *even* money," answered Mr. Sawyer, without, however, making the same sort of face he had done several times before, when he had refused to give double the sum at which he had eventually purchased. "I should say you might get a hundred and twenty for him down there, if you'd luck. But it's a great risk—a great risk—and a long distance; and perhaps

have him sent back to you in the spring. If I wanted a horse, *I'd* give you a hundred for him, though he isn't exactly my sort. A hundred! —I'll tell you what, Sloper, I'll be hanged if I won't *chance* it—I'll *give* you a hundred—*guineas* —come! Money down, and no questions asked."

"I can warrant him sound," answered Mr. Sloper; "and I'd rather *you* had him than anybody. But it's childish talking of a hundred guineas and that horse on the same afternoon. However, I thank you kindly all the same, Mr Sawyer. Barney! shut the box up. Come in, sir, and have *one* glass of sherry before you start. The evenings get chill at this time of year, and that's old sherry, and won't hurt you no more than milk. He *is* a nice horse, Mr. Sawyer, I think — a *very* nice horse, and I'm glad you're pleased with him."

So they returned into the little parlour, and stirred up the fire, and finished the bottle of old sherry: nor is it necessary to remark that, with the concluding glass of that generous fluid the roan became the property of John Standish Sawyer, under the following somewhat complicated agreement:—That he was to give an immediate cheque for a hundred and forty pounds, and ten pounds more at the end of the season; which latter donation was to be increased

to twenty if he should sell him for anything over two hundred—a contingency which the dealer was pleased to observe amounted to what he called "a moral."

The new owner went to look at him once more in the stable, and thought him the nicest horse he ever saw in his life. The walk home, too, was delightful, till the sherry had evaporated, when it became rather tedious; and at dinner-time Mr. Sawyer was naturally less hungry than thirsty. All the evening, however, he congratulated himself on having done a good day's work. All night, too, he dreamed of the roan; and on waking resolved to call him "Hotspur."

When the horse came home next day, he certainly looked rather smaller than his new owner had fancied him. Old Isaac, too, growled out his untoward opinion that he "looked a sort as would work very *light*." But then Isaac always grumbled—it was the old groom's way of enjoying himself.

CHAPTER IV.

MARCHING ORDERS.

ISAAC was a character in his way—quite an institution at The Grange, where, by dint of indomitable tenacity of opinion, and a singular talent for silence, he had contrived to extend his influence over a good many matters not in the least connected with his department. For instance, not a sheep could be killed without consulting Isaac. His word on the subject of pigs was law; and it needed but a wave of his hand to substitute for the useless, hideous, gigantic Cochin-Chinas of the poultry-yard, a certain breed of plump Dorkings, that laid diurnal eggs in their lifetime, and, after death, made almost as handsome an appearance as Norfolk turkeys on the dining-table.

Perhaps the old groom was less omnipotent in the stable than elsewhere. Mr. Sawyer, like many other proprietors of small studs, chose to have his own way with his horses, and would no more have omitted to visit them after break-

fast than he would have neglected to smoke his cigar. It is only the tip-top swells, with whom our friend had not yet scraped acquaintance, who "suppose their *fellow* will have '*two or three*' at the place of meeting." But although it is doubtless a great luxury to own plenty of hunters, this very plurality often prevents a man from finding out which is his best horse. There are not a great many *good* runs over any country in one season. It is a long time before you have treated each one of your dozen to a clipper; and, till then, you only know you have a good *hunter*, but cannot tell you have got a good *horse*.

Mr. Sawyer, however, knew the merits and the failings of his own two or three nags but too well. He was pretty often on their backs, and, when off them, constantly in and out of the stable. Isaac would no more have dared to give one of them a gallop, or a dose of physic, than to have inflicted the same discipline on his master. Nevertheless he grumbled always and continuously. As I have said before, it was the one relaxation he permitted himself. Perhaps he never had a better opportunity of thus disporting himself than on the morning after the new horse came home, when Mr. Sawyer, according to custom, but with a trifle more

eagerness than usual, visited his favourites in their comfortable quarters. According to custom, too, he felt their legs all round; expressed his satisfaction that the grey's had got "quite fine again," and passed over a certain thick-set underbred bay horse without a remark. Indeed, it would have been difficult to say anything complimentary of this animal; and his remaining so long in Mr. Sawyer's stable was less the consequence of his merits than that strangers seemed to have the same opinion of him as was entertained by his own master. It *is* somewhat galling, when we cannot get rid of a bad one, to reflect that it should be so difficult to find a bigger fool than ourselves. The bay, who rejoiced in the classical appellation of *Marathon*, was a slow horse, a sulky horse, and by no means a safe fencer—about as unpleasant a hunter as a man would wish to get upon, but rather a favourite with Isaac notwithstanding, as he was sound, and a voracious feeder. These three, the roan, the grey (who had no name), and the bay, with a little three-cornered jumping hack called Jack-a-Dandy, now constituted Mr. Sawyer's stud; and, as he contemplated them all hard at work with their eleven o'clock feed, he felt that spark of ambition glowing in his bosom which

has lured so many great men to their destruction.

"He *looks* a clipper! don't he, Isaac?" observed the master, nodding towards the roan's long shapely quarters and square tail. "The rarest shaped one we've had in *this* stable for many a day," he added, seeing his servant's features screwed into the well-known twist that denoted disapprobation.

"Looks!" grunted Isaac, who never called his master "sir." "Looks! Ah! he'd be a nice thing enough to knock a light trap about, or do you a day now and then when the country gets dry. He'll never be fit for our ploughs—you see if he will! They'll pull him to pieces in a fortnight—you see if they won't!"

"I don't *want* him for our ploughs," answered Mr. Sawyer, waxing somewhat impatient. "I don't think I shall have another day in the old country this year. Look ye here, Isaac. I'm going to move the horses. I've three now, let alone 'Jack'" (this was an abbreviation for the hack, who seldom enjoyed his full name, being generally designated as above, or as "The Dandy")—"three right good ones. I can easily pick up another, when I'm settled. I'm going down to the grass."

"Grass!" grunted the listener. "Where be that?"

"Well, I'm going to see what sport they have in the shires," answered his master, warming up with the subject—"going to have a look at Mr. Tailby and the Earl of Stamford and Warrington, and try if I can't make a fight good enough to see those Pytchley bitches run into their fox. I'm going to Market Harborough, Isaac. Such horses as mine are wasted in this out-of-the-way country. Why, the grey's the best I've ever had; and the roan ought to be faster than he; and even the bay would carry me better, I think, in that country than he does here."

A gleam as of pity softened old Isaac's hard blue eye, as it rested on Marathon tucking in his feed, and he pictured that devoted animal rolling and lurching, disconsolate, over the ridge-and-furrow of a fifty-acre grass-field. But he only observed, sardonically—

"Markit Harboro', is it? To stand at the sign of the 'Hand-in-Pocket,' I suppose?"

"Never mind what you suppose!" answered Mr. Sawyer, now positively angry. "You do what I bid you. Move the horses down to-morrow by the rail. Take The Boy with you; and mind you keep him out of mischief. I've written to a friend of mine to engage stables,

by last night's post. Next week we'll begin work in right earnest. Come into the house, with your book, after your dinner; and hold your tongue!"

Old Isaac knew better than to pursue the subject any further; and, truth to tell, the old fellow had a spark of his youth's adventurous spirit lingering about him still, which made him not averse to a change, although he thought the scheme wasteful, imprudent, and extravagant. He looked after his master, strolling leisurely towards the house, and observed very slowly to himself and the stable-cat—

"Market 'Arborow! Market 'Arborow! Five days a week, bullock-fences, and a wet country! Thorns, stubs, cracked heels, and hawful wear-an'-tear of horses! No—I couldn't have believed it of him!"

Eight-and-forty hours more saw old Isaac stamping drearily about on the wet pavement of that excellent sporting locality. Market Harborough, though, perhaps, the best head-quarters in the world for fox-hunting can scarcely be termed a gay or very beautiful town. On a wet, drizzling afternoon in early winter, when twilight begins somewhere about 2·45, with no moveable object visible, save a deserted carrier's cart, and a small rain falling, which dulls the

red-brick houses, while it polishes the paved and slippery streets, it is, doubtless, a city suggestive of repose, not to say stagnation. Isaac's was a temperament sufficiently susceptible of all unpleasant influences ; and he began to wish heartily he hadn't come. A variety of disadvantages had occurred to him since his arrival. The price of forage and stabling he considered enormous. The conveniences for hot water were not what he was accustomed to at home. Hotspur did by no means feed well in a strange box : the horse had begun to look poorer day by day, since he left the dealer's. And last night The Boy, who had never been from home before, certainly smelt of gin when he came to bed.

This youth—who, if he once had a name, must have long forgotten it, since he was never called anything but "The Boy"—was a continual thorn in the head groom's side. He had originally been taken solely on Isaac's recommendation, and had caused that worthy more trouble than all the rest of the establishment put together, horses, pigs, and the Cochin-Chinas to boot. He was a light, lathy lad, with a pretty face ; a good horseman, considering his strength, or rather weakness ; and had a knack of keeping his hands down : but he owned

the usual faults of boyhood—carelessness, forgetfulness, "*imperence*" (as Isaac called it), a great love of procrastination, and general insensibility to the beauty of truth.

"If he takes to drinking, the young warmint!" thought Isaac, "I'll larrup the skin off him!" And thus consoling himself, the old man turned his cheek once more to the chill, misty heavens, and shook his head. His horses were done up; the door locked, and the key in his pocket; the boy also secured by the same means in the loft. Master could not arrive till eight or nine o'clock. It was the hour when, at The Grange, he was accustomed to see the pigs feed and the chickens to roost. He wished he was back in the old country: the time hung heavily on the old groom's hands.

"Nothing to do, and lots of time to do it in! that seems to be about the size of it—eh, governor?" said a voice at his elbow; and, turning round, Isaac confronted a short and dapper personage, whom, by a sort of free-masonry, he had no difficulty in recognising as one of his own profession.

At any other time he would have treated this worthy's advances to acquaintance with sovereign contempt; but his spirits were depressed, and his heart solitary, so he vented a

grunt of acquiesence, which, for him, was wonderfully polite.

"I think I see you arrive yesterday, with two or three nags," continued this affable functionary, "when I was out a hairin' some o' mine; and you're puttin' up close by my place. Come in, governor, and take something hot, to keep the cold off till we becomes better acquainted."

With this hospitable offer, Isaac found himself following his new friend into a cosy little tap-room, with red curtains and a sanded floor, which apartment they had all to themselves; and whilst "something hot"—a delicious compound of yolk of egg, brown sugar, warm beer, and cordial gin—was being got ready, he had time to study the exterior of his new acquaintance.

Probably the utmost ingenuity of the tailor's art must have been exhausted in constructing trousers so tight as the pair which clung to that person's legs. Not a crease had they, nor a fold anywhere; and unless the man slept in them, it was difficult to conceive how they could conveniently be used as articles of daily apparel. The person's boots, too, were neat, round-toed Wellington's; his waistcoat descended far below his hips; and the waist-buttons of his grey-mixture coat were unusually low and wide apart.

A cream-coloured silk neck-cloth, secured by a horse-shoe pin, set off a pale, sharp-looking countenance, speaking of hot stables and dissipation, while the closest possible crop of hair and whiskers did justice to a shaved hat with an exceedingly flat brim. A few splashes of mud on the boots and trousers showed he had been lately on horseback; and he held up one of his thin little legs as he took his seat, and contemplated the stains, with a grin of morbid satisfaction.

"Blessed if ever I see this country so deep!" he remarked, after a pull at the flip. "How *my* horses will stand it, I know no more than the dead, the way the governor rides. We've *only* nine this year; and he's an awful hard man upon a horse."

"Nine!" exclaimed old Isaac, smacking his lips after the draught, which warmed the very cockles of his heart; and, being a man of few words, only added, "Well, now, to *be* sure!"

"He *is* awful hard upon 'em—that's the truth," continued the narrator. "It was only last week he says to me, 'Tiptop,' says he—*my* name's Tiptop—'what made Boadicea' (that's our bay mare by Bellerophon, out of Blue Light) —'what made Boadicea stop with me under Carlton Clump to-day? Either she wasn't fit,'

says he, 'or she isn't worth five shillings.' 'Well, sir,' says I, 'the mare's a gross feeder,' says I; 'and you ride with *rayther* a slack rein.' 'Slack rein be hanged!' says he. 'If ever such a thing happens again, you'll get the sack,' says he. So I up and told him I was ready to go whenever he could replace me; and the upshot of it was as he apologised quite like a gentleman; for, indeed, he wouldn't know whatever to do without me. He's a good man—my governor—enough; but he's hasty—very hasty. Why, to see him coming over a gate into the turnpike-road, as I did t'other day, on Catamount—that's our chesnut, as ran fourth for the Liverpool—you'd say he'd no discretion whatever; but they've all got their faults—all on 'em. What's yours? Can he ride?"

Discreet Isaac answered with a counter-question. "What's your governor's name?" said he, peeping once more into the waning pewter measure.

"The Honourable Crasher," replied Mr. Tip-top, not without an air of exultation. "A brother he is to the Hearl of Heligoland. Now I've told *you* all about it, old bloke. There—you ease your mind in return, and give us *your* name."

"I'll let you know when I've seen the register,"

answered Isaac. "But it's a long way to the parish as owes me a settlement ; and I'm afraid you'll have to wait, Mr. Tiptop, till I can communicate with you by post." Saying which, Isaac finished the flip at a gulp, and walked off to seven-o'clock stables, without uttering another word.

CHAPTER V.

"BOOTS AND SADDLES."

LONDON is in the way to everywhere. I have an old friend—an honest Lincolnshire Squire, who paying his sister a visit in Norfolk, always goes and returns by London. I do not think it is necessary to traverse Oxford-street in order to proceed from the Old Country to Market Harborough; and yet on the day that witnessed his faithful groom's introduction to Mr. Tiptop, John Standish Sawyer might have been, and indeed *was*, seen crossing that crowded thoroughfare, with hasty steps and an air of considerable pre-occupation.

The fact is, Mr. Sawyer was full of business. In the first place, it is needless to observe, he had been to have his hair cut—a rite seldom neglected by the true Englishman when entering upon a new phase in his career. Also he had to purchase many articles of wearing apparel, such as are only to be procured in the metropolis. Since his rejection by Miss Mexico (for

previous to that casualty he had been rather a gaudy dresser than otherwise), our friend, although preserving an equestrian exterior, had suffered his wardrobe to run considerably to seed. In truth, there was little temptation to extravagance on that score at The Grange. But now that he was about to take his place, as he observed, amongst the sporting aristocracy of Great Britain, it would be necessary to call in the aid of such artists as consider themselves the especial providers of boots, breeches, &c., for the first flight.

When I met him he was hurrying towards the well-known emporium of Messrs. Putty & Co., now universally acknowledged to be the only firm in London at which a truly workmanlike top-boot — combining, as their advertisement expresses it, "comfort to the wearer, with satisfaction to the looker-on"—is to be obtained. I could not resist my friend's imploring request to accompany him into the shop, and favour him with my experience on a subject which cannot be mastered without considerable observation and reflection.

Like most people from the country, Mr. Sawyer feels somewhat shy in the presence of a fashionable London tradesman. When he entered the warehouse, a languid gentleman, with one

shoeless foot placed on a square of brown paper, was drawling out his directions to Messrs. Putty's foreman, an exceedingly smart and voluble disciple of St. Crispin.

"Not too thick," said the languid man, in a tone of utter physical exhaustion. "Man can't ride nicely, if he don't feel his stirrup through his boot;" and Sawyer nudged my elbow with a delighted wink, that seemed to say—"This swell, too, is a votary of Diana!"

The languid man's silk-stockinged foot having been re-shod, he rose with great difficulty, and moved feebly in the direction of his brougham, from the window of which he adjured the shopman, in a faint voice, to forward "the tops when finished to my address at Market Harborough," and sank back amongst the cushions, completely overcome.

The talismanic syllables raised the curiosity of my friend. "Who is it?" he whispered eagerly to the returning shopman; and that worthy, placing a chair and a fresh square of brown paper for his new customer, replied somewhat condescendingly—"*That*, sir? That's the Honourable Crasher, sir; hunting gentleman, and *very* particular about his tops. What can I do for *you*, sir?"

I had now an opportunity of observing the

great warmth and thickness of the worsted stockings, in which my friend kept his legs encased; also the stout proportions of those useful limbs, more adapted perhaps for the Highland kilt, than any other costume. Mr. Putty's foreman saw at a glance the difficulties he would have to contend with, and prepared to subdue them.

"Very muscular gentleman!" said he; passing his tape round my friend's calf. "Great pedestrian powers, I should say. Inconvenient in the saddle; but will endeavour to rectify that. Excuse me, sir: take the liberty of asking whereabouts you generally hunt."

"Hunt?" repeated the customer. "Oh! Leicestershire — Northamptonshire — all about there—in the neighbourhood of Market Harborough." Mr. Sawyer spoke in a vague general sort of way, as if he was in the habit of pervading the whole of the grazing districts.

A cloud gathered on the foreman's brow.

"The Shires!" he rejoined, with a perplexed air; "that increases our difficulties very much indeed. I could have made you, now, a particular neat *provincial* boot; but with this pattern it's exceedingly difficult to attain the correct appearance for the flying countries. I'll show you a pair here, sir, that the Honourable

Crasher sent back this very morning, because they fell away the eighth-of-an-inch at the setting on of the leg, and the Honourable's girth is at least two-and-a-half less than yours. You wouldn't like a pair of Napoleon's, I presume. Very fashionable just now, sir. All the gentlemen wear them in the Vale of Aylesbury."

I confess I rather expected an outburst at this suggestion: my friend sharing with me a strong prejudice against what have been termed "Butcher-boots;" but—

"Prolonged endurance tames the bold,"

and Sawyer submitted with considerable patience to the foreman's promise, that they would do all in their power to make him two pair of top-boots, only inferior to those of the Honourable Crasher, and send them down to him in a little over a fortnight; or, "*not* to disappoint him, say *punctually* that day three weeks."

A thorough revisal of gloves, neckcloths, &c., is soon made; and after a hearty luncheon at the railway station, I put my friend into a first-class carriage attached to the fast train, and wished him "Good sport," and "Good-bye," with a feeling somewhat akin to envy, as I remained in smoky London, and he was whirled away into the soft fragrant country saturated with rain, and smiling itself to sleep in the calm

grey light of a mild winter's afternoon. He had but one fellow-passenger, of whom more anon.

I wonder whether the reflections of other men in a railway-carriage, bowling through the midland counties at the rate of forty miles an hour, on such a day as I have described, are like my own. I honestly confess that a very few ideas, if they are favourite ones, are sufficient to fill my brain. As I speed along the level embankments, which give one such a commanding view of the surrounding country, I cannot help imagining myself on the back of a good horse, sailing away from field to field after a pack of hounds. How well I can see my way!—how easy the fences look!—how readily I distinguish the place I should make him take off at, and the exact spot on which he would land, choosing unhesitatingly the soundest ridge on which I should increase my pace so confidently down to that glassy brook, that looks as if you could hop over it from here, but which memory tells me is at least fifteen feet of water! How easy to get a start from that spinny, shaped liked a cocked-hat, of which the three corners have puzzled me so often, never hitting the one the hounds came out at, though I have tried them all in turn! How contemptible the size of this

woodland, in which I have yet known a fox hang for hours together! What a run I have in imagination! and how well I see it! Alas! like everything else coloured through that deceitful medium, how different from the "cold reality!"

Nevertheless, much as I sympathise in his bride's consternation, I cannot deny a fellow-feeling with that bridegroom of whom it is related that, on a wedding-trip of many hours by the side of his late-won treasure, during which he ceased not to scan the adjacent fences with a practical eye, he uttered never a word during the entire journey, save this one remarkable sentence, "There's my place! Where would *you* have it?"

Some such ruminations as the above probably engrossed the whole of my friend's intellects, till the courteous offer of *Punch*—containing, as usual, one of Leech's inimitable hunting sketches—drew his attention to his fellow-traveller, under whose multiplicity of wrappers he had no difficulty in recognising the placid features of the gentleman he had that morning noticed in the boot-shop. It was, indeed, none other than the Honourable Crasher; by this time completely worn out, and who, to do him justice, was a gentleman-like, well-featured

fellow enough, if he had not always looked so dreadfully tired.

The reply to such a courtesy, where there were no ladies in the carriage, could only be, "Have you any objection to smoking?" And as nobody ever *does* object now-a-days to that soothing practice, and the "forty-shilling penalty" is, I trust, simply a dead-letter and a fallacy, the *Laranagas* were produced, and a couple of them soon got very freely under way.

No introduction from a mutual friend is equal to that of a cigar. Any two votaries of the "pleasant vice," at least during the time they are engaged in its practice, are sure to fraternise, and in five minutes Mr. Sawyer and the Honourable Crasher were hard at it, I need scarcely observe, on the subject of fox-hunting; the former resolving, as far as possible, to pick the brains of his new acquaintance (if he could find them) on that exhaustless topic; the latter positively warming into a languid enthusiasm on the only subject to which he could direct his whole attention for ten consecutive minutes.

Racing men are bad enough. Politicians are sufficiently long-winded. A couple of agriculturists will keep the ball rolling pretty perseveringly on the congenial themes of "cake," mangold wurzel, shorthorns, reaping machines,

and guano; but I have heard ladies, who are perhaps the best judges of volubility, affirm that, for energy, duration, and the faculty of saying the same thing over and over again, a dialogue between a couple of fox-hunters beats every other kind of discussion completely out of the field.

Mr. Sawyer took the initiative by pointing to the fox's tusk which fastened the string in his new friend's hat.

"Done anything this last week?" said he, with that mysterious air specially affected by all individuals who are connected, however remotely, with horse-flesh, and which, I believe, has much to answer for, in the impression of consummate roguery which it conveys to the uninitiated. "It's been good scenting weather in my part of the world. Hounds must have run hard on the grass."

The Honourable Crasher emitted a large volume of smoke, ere he roused himself for the effort, and replied: "Good thing, last Friday, with the Pytchley, from Fox Hall. Do you know that country?" he added, thinking, if his listener did *not*, he might save himself the trouble of detailing it.

"I am on my way down to hunt there now," rejoined our friend, "so I take an interest,

naturally, in your sport. Last Friday, you say? Ah! that was the day we had such a fine run over *our* country. Two hours and forty-seven minutes, and killed our fox—*and killed our fox*," he repeated, as if such a climax was sufficiently rare to merit more than common attention.

Nothing but the spirit of emulation between different packs could have embarked the Honourable Crasher on a long story; but he woke up from his lethargy at this juncture, and observed—

"Two hours and forty-seven minutes? Indeed! It must have been a fine run; but slow, I conclude—slow. I never care much for anything over an hour. It's labour and sorrow, *walking* after hounds, to *my* mind."

"Slow!" retorted Mr. Sawyer, indignantly. "Not at all; I was riding the best horse in my stable, and he had to do all he knew to live with them. Fine country, too—wild fox-hunting country—not a soul in the fields; very deep, and a good deal of fencing. I don't know that I was ever better carried," he added, meditatively, hoping to bring the conversation round to the merits of the grey.

But the Honourable Crasher had his story to tell too, and broke in with unusual vehemence:

"*Ours* was about the quickest thing I ever rode to. Found in Faxton Corner; fox never hung a second, and the hounds ran him over those large grass fields as if they were tied to him, all down by— Dear me, I forget the names of the places, and I never *can* describe a run; but if you don't know the country, it don't signify. In short, they ran him all about, you know, over a capital line, and turned him up in the open, at the end of seven-and-twenty minutes, without a check, and very straight, you know, and all that; satisfactory to everybody, and not at all bad fun, and so on." The Honourable C—— was rapidly collapsing, running down like the last notes of a musical box. Ere he arrived at this very explicit conclusion, he had become perfectly torpid again.

Finding his neighbour would not listen to *his* story, Mr. Sawyer thought he might as well get what he could in the way of information, and began accordingly to propound a series of questions, only interrupted by the occasional apparition, at the window, of a broad chest and ruddy, bearded face belonging to the guard, who, seeing the gentlemen still smoking, vanished again incontinently. The examination proceeded much as follows, the catechumen, though

waking up at intervals, becoming more and more comatose.

Mr. Sawyer: "It is very stiff, isn't it, that Pytchley country? Large fences that won't bear liberties being taken with them?"

The Honourable Crasher: "Yeas, I should say, it wanted a hunter to get over it."

Mr. S.: "Do you consider it as difficult to cross as the Quorn?"

The Hon. C.: "Yeas—no—that's to say I ride the same horses in both; I don't know that there's much difference."

"Whom do you consider your best men now, in your field?"

"Oh! there are lots of fellows who can ride, *if they get a start.* It's impossible to say; there's a good deal in luck, and a good deal in horses." [N.B. This is hardly a sincere speech of the Hon. C——'s. He does *not* think either luck or horseflesh constitutes a *customer*, and has not the slightest doubt in his own mind as to whom he considers about the best performer in that or any other country; only modesty forbids him to name the individual.]

Mr. S.,—a little dissatisfied:—"I suppose the Leicestershire men are splendidly mounted?"

Hon. C.——: "No; I should say not. I never remember seeing so few good horses. I

shouldn't know where to get a hunter if I wanted one!"

Mr. Sawyer thought of the roan, and ran his eye over his friend's slim figure and horseman-like shape. "He'd carry him like a bird," thought the owner, "and I shouldn't mind letting him have him for two hundred, or say, if I dropped into a good thing with him, two hundred and *fifty*;" but he only observed, "I suppose you are *very* well mounted yourself?"

"So-so," was the reply. "I'm rather short just now, only ten. Good useful brutes some of them; but I shouldn't say *my* lot was quite first-class, by any means!"

Again, Mr. Sawyer found subject for rumination. Ten! Only ten! and not first-class ones neither, though it was probable that a man who had ten hunters in his stable would not find it worth while to keep a bad one; and then he thought of his own three, and the severe infliction it would be to have to ride Marathon over the fences, which, as he looked from the window, loomed larger and larger in the twilight, as they approached the grazing districts. No secret, it has been said, is so close as that between a horse and his rider; and Mr. Sawyer hardly liked to confess, even to himself, the very inferior brute he had got in the bay.

Somehow all the difficulties into which he had put him seemed to rise in his mind's eye, like an accumulation of photographs, as he sat back amongst the cushions, and, withdrawing his gaze from the outward world, fixed it on the lately-lit lamp above his head.

He remembered, not without a shudder, what a cropper the brute gave him at that stile in the potato-garden, which at least he might have scrambled over, if he had only risen six inches. He recalled the famous run he lost from the Forty-acres, because no persuasion would induce Marathon to face the bullfinch enclosing that meritorious fox-covert, and which a donkey could get through, if he would only look at it. He reflected how the animal perversely

"Struck all his timber, fathomed all his ditches;"

how he had never cleared a brook with him, or gone a run to his master's satisfaction; and how even old Isaac allowed his favourite "wur a better nag in the stable nor he wur in the field;" and so musing, he shuddered to think of their joint endeavours to get out of a fifty-acre pasture, with an ox-fence all round it, and the gate locked!

To avoid such horrible visions, he would have plunged once more into conversation, but looking at his neighbour, observed he was now deep

in "The Idylls of the King"—an epic which served at least to keep the Honourable Crasher awake, thereby substantiating a theory I have heard broached by certain philosophers, and which I am not entirely prepared to dispute, viz.: that there is something of poetry in every man who rides hard across a country.

Certainly not a Knight of the Table Round could have been more daring in the saddle than the Honourable Crasher, for all his dissipated looks and languid manners; nor could he have been so engrossed in the fate of "The Lily Maid of Astolat," nor so lost in the description of the black barge floating dreamily down with its snowy burden (perhaps the most beautiful piece of word-painting in the language), had he not acknowledged in some corner of his much-neglected intellect that *divinæ particula auræ*, which may often be found, like a sweet wayside flower, blooming in the most unexpected and uncultivated localities.

Though Mr. Sawyer was himself innocent of all such weaknesses, he had the grace not to interrupt his fellow-traveller, and consequently not a word more was spoken till they exchanged a courteous "good evening," as they glided into the Market-Harborough Station, and the new arrival wondered in his own mind how it was

possible for any one man to require such a quantity of clothing as must be contained in the numerous portmanteaus which the guard's van produced, and which were claimed by the Honourable Crasher as his own.

"He can't have been a week in town," thought our honest friend, "for he was hunting here only last Friday, and he's taken more clothes with him than I've got for my whole kit in the world!"

He had, however, his own affairs to attend to —himself and his modest luggage to stow away in a damp fly, with a broken-winded horse; his dinner to order at the principal hotel, where he meant to reside—at least, till he found out if he liked his quarters. For so old a traveller, he committed in this matter a somewhat unaccountable mistake. Dazzled by the magnificence of his manners, and the sumptuous verbal bill of fare which the waiter stated to be available, he left the details of his meal to that functionary —an oversight which produced a somewhat untoward result, inasmuch as that, after a visit to his stables, a minute inspection of his horses, and a long consultation with Isaac, concerning which of them he should ride on the morrow, interspersed with many complaints and prognostications of evil from the latter, when he

returned to his apartment very hungry and in want of comfort, he found the following banquet prepared for his delectation : A slice of soft cod, one raw mutton-chop relieved by an under-done ditto, two sorts of pickles, and some exceedingly strong cheese.

CHAPTER VI.

HAZY WEATHER.

When Mr. Sawyer awoke in the morning, his first impression was, that he had never left The Grange, but that the pattern of his bedroom paper was strangely altered, and the situation of his couch had been mysteriously changed in the night.

It was not till he had turned over, and yawned twice or thrice, that he comprehended the actual position in which he was placed. Then, for the first time, the magnitude of the undertaking on which he had embarked presented itself to his mind; and then did he realize the deficiencies of his stud, the difficulties he was about to encounter, the rashness and perplexity of the whole proceeding. A feeling of loneliness stole over him; and he even experienced a want of confidence in himself. For an instant, he almost wished he was back at home, and the dastardly possibility of returning there flashed across his mind. All these unworthy thoughts, however,

were dissipated by the entrance of Isaac, with a pair of boots in one hand, and a glimmering bed-room candle in the other, as the mists of morning are dispelled by the rising sun; and, even as the shrinking combatant gathers confidence from the flash of his drawn sword, so, at the first glimpse of those long-rowelled spurs of which Marathon knew too well the persuasive powers, John Standish Sawyer was himself again.

"Half after eight, sir," said Isaac, setting down the candle, and proceeding to pour cold water into the tub—a process that by no means tempted his master to rise on the instant. "Half after eight, sir; and the grey's got a bit of a cough. It's that strange stable as done it. And you was to let me know in the morning which of them I was to take on."

"What sort of a day is it?" asked our friend, in a sleepy voice, turning, like Dr. Watts's sluggard, into a more comfortable position. At that moment, it would not have broken his heart to be told that it was too hard to hunt.

"Can't see your hand," was the encouraging reply: "its one of these regular Leicester-sheer fogs—so the grooms tells me—as is wery prevalent hereabouts. The lamps is lit now in the

streets; but it'll be wusser up on the high ground. They'll hunt, though, just the same, says they. Weather never stops them here, unless it be the sewerest of frost and snow, as I understand. Shall I open the shutters, sir?"

Isaac threw them back as he spoke, and drew up the blind, disclosing to Mr. Sawyer's view about eighteen feet of tiles, a weathercock pointing east-south-east, and a chimney adorned with what is called an "old woman"—an ingenious contrivance to prevent it from smoking, but in this instance, to judge by the smell of soot which pervaded the apartment, by no means a successful piece of mechanism—the whole wrapped in a mantle of the densest and *wettest* fog he ever remembered to have seen.

"Sure to be late such a morning as this," thought Mr. Sawyer, preparing for another comfortable half-hour in bed; but then he reflected that he must send Isaac forward with a horse, also that he should have to find his own way to Tilton Wood, on his hack—a sufficiently intricate proceeding as studied overnight by the map, but which might become excessively puzzling when reduced to practice, through large pastures and unknown bridle-gates, on such a morning as the present.

"Take on the grey!" said he, peremptorily,

ignoring the cough; "and order breakfast for me in three-quarters of an hour."

The fact is, Mr. Sawyer had but the grey to ride. He did not quite fancy giving the roan his earliest trial in what he understood to be a hilly country; and as for making his first appearance in High Leicestershire on Marathon —really, though both were pretty strong, neither his nerves nor his self-conceit would have stood such a test.

Somehow, everything went wrong, as is apt to be the case in a strange place, and when we are particularly anxious for the reverse. He cut himself shaving. His leathers were damp, and badly cleaned; looser, too, at the knees, and tighter in the thighs, than he liked. Also, he couldn't find his button-hook; and any one who has put on boots and breeches without the aid of that implement, will sympathise with his distress. Isaac knew where it was, doubtless; but, ere his master arrived at the stage of toilet at which it was required, Isaac and the grey had made their *first* wrong turn in the fog, about a mile from the town, on their way to Tilton Wood.

Altogether, by the time The Boy, with rather heavy eyes and an unwashed face, had brought round Jack-a-Dandy, our friend was in that

mood which is best described as having "got out of bed with the wrong foot foremost."

Once in the saddle, however, things mended rapidly. No *horseman* could get upon Jack-a-Dandy without feeling what a good little animal it was; and, indeed, Jack's career had been a somewhat adventurous one. Thorough-bred, but too small to be put in training, he had fallen into the hands of a steeple-chasing horse-dealer, who sank his pedigree, and put him in one or two good handicaps as "his daughter's pony." Master Jack could jump like a deer, and, with nine stone seven on his back, was quite able to make hunters of considerable pretensions look extremely foolish. This could not go on for ever, and the dealer broke, after which, Jack carried the drunken whip of a pack of Irish foxhounds for two seasons, and, when that establishment "busted up," found his way once more into his native country, as leader in a young gentleman's tandem, who tried to graduate at Oxford. Pending the failure of that acolyte, he had a good deal of fun at Bullingdon, winning cleverly whenever he had a chance, and only left the University because his master did, who took him to London, and, despite certain eccentricities, rode him in the Park. When that youth was compelled to obtain his passports for

the Continent, Jack, in company with several other valuables, was seized by the creditors; and I fancy he had a very bad time of it for two or three years, till he turned up at Smithfield, nothing but skin, bone, and blemishes, with a pair of raw shoulders that would have made you sick. Here Mr. Sawyer, struck with his "make-and-shape," bought him, after a good deal of haggling, for thirteen pounds ten shillings, throwing in half-a-crown for luck, and standing two pots of beer and a glass of brandy-and-water, besides the man's expenses who brought him to the West-end. Altogether, he cost him less than fourteen sovereigns; and he justly considered him very cheap at the money. Though his knees were broke, and he was fired all round, he never stumbled or was lame; and if you didn't mind a succession of kicks for the first half-mile, and a mouth which bad usage had rendered perfectly callous, he was as pleasant a hack as you could wish to get upon. Jack never wanted to pull, if the rein was laid on his neck; but the moment it was caught hold of, his old associations took it as a signal to *go*, and go he *would*, accordingly. With regard to his appellation—the last among many *aliases*—when his master called him "Jack," old Isaac called him "The Dandy," and *vice versâ*.

There are a good many ways from Market Harborough to Tilton Wood. Of course, the morning being very thick, and Mr. Sawyer a perfect stranger to the country, he chose the most intricate, hoping to pass between the Langtons—of which, for the more complete bewilderment of strangers, there are five or six —and so to reach Stanton Wyville, whence he meant boldly to leave the lanes, and strike out into a line of bridle-gates, by the corner of Stanton Wood, which might or might not eventually land him somewhere about Skeffington.

Deluded man! Ere he reached the grass-track he meant to follow, the fog was denser than ever. He managed to get through one bridle-gate, after catching his horse's rein on the post—an insult which The Dandy resented by putting his head down, and racing wilfully and aimlessly into the surrounding obscurity—and then found himself riding round and round the same field, with extraordinary perseverance, and not the remotest chance of escape.

He would have liked, now, to get back again into the lanes; but he could not even hit the gate at which he entered, and had embarked upon the tedious process of coasting the field methodically, for that purpose, and giving up all idea of hunting for the day, when, much to

his relief, he spied a gigantic object looming through the fog, which, on a nearer approach, proved to be nothing larger than a horseman, cantering confidently towards him.

On inspection, this timely arrival turned out to be the Honourable Crasher, with an enormous cigar in his mouth, looking more tired than ever, and, apparently, quite unconscious of the fog and everything else. With an effort, however, he recognised his fellow-traveller of the day before, and courteously offered to guide him—a proposal which the latter accepted with great readiness.

"I had *almost* lost myself," said he, "what with this thick fog, and not knowing the country."

To which the Honourable Crasher replied, "*Y-e-e-es*—it makes one cough, but it's all plain sailing now," and broke into a gallop.

Poor Mr. Sawyer! If he had only known it! His guide was one of the many gentlemen who could hunt twenty years from the same place, and never know their shortest way from one point to another.

CHAPTER VII.

A LEICESTERSHIRE LARK.

By good luck our pair of lost sheep soon hit the bridle-gate Mr. Sawyer had been seeking in vain.

"I suppose it's all right," said the Honourable Crasher, putting his horse into a canter, with the loose rein and easy off-hand seat peculiar to a gentleman riding to covert.

Mr. Sawyer, following close in his wake, devoutly hoped it was so; but had little leisure for considering the subject, inasmuch as his energies were completely engrossed by the delicate task of gammoning The Dandy that he didn't want to pull at him. He knew too well, by the way his little horse's ears were laid back, that he was fully prepared, and only sought an excuse, to come with a rush at the shortest possible notice.

They went on pleasantly enough for a mile or so, the Honourable leading, and commencing a variety of courteous remarks to his follower,

which invariably broke off in the middle. At last, the former pulled up with an air of uncertainty.

"Very odd," he said; "often as I've come this way before, I never remember the gate locked." He had put his whip confidently under the latch, and his horse's chest against the top, without the slightest effect. "'Pon my soul, it seems rather absurd, but I do believe *we've* lost our way."

"*We*," thought Mr. Sawyer; "and this fiend in top-boots laughs as if it were a joke!" but he only said aloud, "I shall get down and take it off its hinges."

The Honourable's reply was simple and conclusive. He pointed to the upper hinge, craftily turned downward, so as effectually to prevent all tampering with it, and observed in a tone of melancholy apology, "The fence seems *rather* a bad one" (it was an "oxer," about seven feet high, and impervious to a bird!). "Do you think your horse could get over the gate after mine? This is only a five-year-old, and very likely to break it," he added, with the manner of a nurse tempting a child to take its dose.

I have said Mr. Sawyer was a brave man, and so he was; but I am bound to confess the proposition startled him not a little. Put yourself

in his place, courteous reader, and say whether a foggy morning, an uninhabited country, and the necessity of riding a horse barely fourteen-two over a gate more than four feet high, after a languid desperado in pursuit of an uncertainty, was not a somewhat alarming contingency. Nevertheless, there was nothing else for it. The Honourable turned his horse round, took him in a grasp of iron, and put him rather slowly at the gate, which the animal, a well-bred, raking-looking chesnut, with a long bang-tail, got over exceedingly badly, striking the top bar with fore and hind legs; but neither disturbing the Honourable Crasher's seat nor the imperturbability of his demeanour in the slightest degree. He looked back, however, to see his companion come, and even condescended to express a feeble approval of his performance, without removing the cigar from his mouth.

It is but justice to The Dandy to observe, that he no sooner obtained "the office" from his rider, and saw what was expected of him, than he cocked his ears, took the bit in his teeth, and bounded over the gate like a buck, indemnifying himself for the effort, by breaking clean away with his rider as soon as he landed, and going by the Honourable Crasher and his chesnut like a flash of lightning.

I have often observed that the blood of a languid person, if once he or she gets it "up," boils more fervidly than that of less peaceful temperaments; perhaps it is altogether a thicker fluid, and consequently more retentive of caloric. Be this as it may, no sooner did the Honourable Crasher behold Mr. Sawyer speeding by him like an express train, than, roused by the example, and further stimulated by the insubordination of the chesnut, he sat well down in the saddle; and, taking his horse by the head, soon caught up and passed the astonished Sawyer, merely remarking, "We've got a *little* out of the line; you seem to be riding a good fencer, and had better follow me!" and then proceeded to lead his victim perfectly *straight* across country, in the direction of Tilton Wood; the fog, too, was by this time clearing off considerably, or it might be they had emerged from the region of its influence, and the stranger had not even the advantage of its friendly veil to hide from him the dangers by which he was encompassed.

To this day Mr. Sawyer has not left off talking about this his first ride over High Leicestershire. After a bottle of port, he even becomes heterodox for so good a sportsman, and vows he would rather gallop to covert over those grass fields, than see a run in any other

country in the world. I have my doubts, however, whether he enjoyed it so very much at the time. Jack put him down twice; first at an ox-fence, of which the rail was from him, and which, although his leader hit it very hard, deluded the unsuspecting Dandy; and secondly, by landing on a covered drain, which gave way with him, and superinduced one of those falls that are generally designated "collar-boners." On this occasion the Honourable Crasher brought him back his horse, with quite a radiant expression of countenance.

"What a good little animal it is!" said he, throwing the reins back over its neck. "I'm trying to 'crop' this beggar of mine, and I very soon *should*, if I had to follow *you*."

In effect, the chesnut's head and bridle-band were plastered over with mud, although his rider's coat was as yet unstained.

At Skeffington, they relapsed into a quiet trot, and rode on together, feeling as if they could hardly realise the fact, that twenty-four hours ago they were utter strangers to each other.

It is odd how people cast up at a meet of fox-hounds, from all sorts of different directions, even on the most unpromising mornings. Though the fog was as thick as ever at the top

of the hill, and Tilton Wood, at no time the best of places to "get away from," was perfectly invisible at two hundred yards' distance, there was already a good sprinkling of sportsmen assembled at the fixture. Two or three "swells" from Melton, very much the pattern of the Honourable Crasher, had arrived on their smoking hacks, and were greeted by him with considerable cordiality. Truth to tell, the Honourable dearly loved what he called "a customer," meaning simply an individual who was fool enough to rate his neck at the value he did his own; and, indeed, he never would have taken so affably to Mr. Sawyer, on such short notice, had the latter not been fortunate enough to possess an excellent hack-hunter in Jack-a-Dandy, and bold enough to make very free use of that jumping little animal; the hounds, too, had already arrived, and in the glimpse which Mr. Sawyer caught of them as he rode up, he was sportsman enough to remark that they looked speedy, stout, level, and uncommonly fit to go. Such a pack, he thought, would not even have disgraced the Old Country! the huntsman also seemed to afford the happy combination of a *riding* as well as a hunting one; and the other servants were remarkably well mounted, and looked like business. Mr.

Sawyer began to feel quite keen, and to look about for Isaac and the grey, who had not made their appearance; the other Harboro' hunters, however, had not yet come up; their grooms had, probably, taken the chance of a late meet to refresh in a body somewhere on the road; there was nothing for it but to light a cigar, and wait patiently for more daylight.

Two or three clever-looking horses with side-saddles, denoted that if the weather had been more propitious, the same number of fair equestrians would have graced the field. Mr. Sawyer particularly remarked a very neat chesnut, apparently, like the groom who led it, exceedingly loath to be ordered home. A peremptory gentleman, in particularly good boots and breeches, with a clerical white neckcloth, and black coat, who had just arrived on wheels, seemed to be the proprietor of this shapely animal. Mr. Sawyer caught himself vaguely wondering whether it belonged to his wife or daughter, and laughed at his own pre-occupation as he thought "what *could* it signify to him?"

It is very tiresome work, that waiting for a fog to clear off before hounds are put into covert. In all other anti-hunting weather, you know, to a certain extent, what you are about; the frost, that sent you to look at the thermo-

meter last night before you went to bed, is either all gone by twelve o'clock, or the matter is set at rest the other way, and you make up your mind not to hunt again till the moon changes. It is the same thing with snow ; and, moreover, if you *can* hunt on the surface of mother earth when wrapped in her spotless shroud, she rewards you by carrying a capital scent. But in a fog everything is uncertain and obscure ; it may clear off in ten minutes, or it may not be so dense elsewhere. It seems a pity to go home, when the very signal for a return may herald a change of weather ; and yet it is a melancholy amusement to walk hounds and horses round a wet field till far on in the afternoon. Everybody is of a different opinion too, usually regulated by personal convenience ; those who live a long way off are all for having a try, whilst the man who has ridden his hunter a mile or two to the place of meeting, and can keep him fresh for next day, opines that "It is madness—folly—you'll disturb your country—you'll lose your hounds—you might as well go out hunting in the middle of the night," &c.

On the present occasion it was obvious that the day was getting worse. Sheets of mist came driving up the valleys, and wreathing round the crests of the wooded hills ; the slight breeze

seemed but to bring up fresh relays of vapour, and every visible object, trees, hedges, gates—nay, the very ears of the horses, and whiskers of their riders, were dripping and saturated with moisture. The Master of the Hounds, a thorough sportsman, never to be beat by a difficulty, announced his intention of waiting whilst any one else remained; but it soon appeared that ere long he would have the field to himself. The Melton gentlemen lost no time in galloping home on their hacks, to while away the hours till dinner-time with a "smoking rubber." Half-a-dozen yeomen adjourned to a neighbouring farm-house to have what they called "a snack" and drink a goodly allowance of port and sherry in the middle of the day. Even the clerical gentleman, owner of the chesnut ladies'-horse, thought it wouldn't do, and just as Isaac on the grey turned up at the head of a strong detachment from Harborough, with whom he had fortunately fallen in, after losing his way twice, it was finally decided that the hounds should go home, and the day's hunting be given up.

Warmed by his ride to covert, and hopeless of finding his way back, except in the same company, Mr. Sawyer lost no time in exchanging the Dandy for the grey. "If we are to lark

home," he thought, "I may as well ride a nag I can trust; but if ever I pin my faith upon one of these thin-booted gentlemen to show me the way again, why, I shall deserve the worst that can happen to me—that's all!"

Now, although the appearance of a stranger does not create such a sensation in Leicestershire as in more remote countries, yet the Honourable Crasher was so well known, that it was natural some inquiries should be made as to his companion; for the Honourable C., who was thoroughly good-natured, had no sooner fraternised with our friend than he began to consider him in some sort, and in his own off-hand way, as under his especial charge. Mr. Sawyer's exterior, too, although not extraordinarily prepossessing, was undoubtedly workmanlike. As he settled himself in the grey's saddle, and altered the stirrups which Isaac could never be persuaded to pull to the same length, the clerical gentleman ranging alongside of the Honourable whispered to the latter:

"Who's that fellow? Is he staying with you at Harborough?"

The Honourable laughed feebly.

"Don't know him from Adam," he replied, as if there could be any connection between the two. "He don't seem half a bad fellow though,"

he added, "and I shouldn't wonder if he could ride."

Now, the clerical gentleman, who was, indeed, no other than the well known Parson Dove, had struck up a firm alliance with the Honourable Crasher, cemented on both sides by a keen love for fox-hunting, or perhaps I should rather say for galloping and jumping over a country—the Parson, be it observed, being the best *sportsman* of the two. On an occasion like the present, he hoped to secure his friend's company at luncheon, by which stroke of policy he should please Mrs. Dove, who was not unprepared, and also show him a certain four-year-old, by which the Reverend set great store. Nay, it was by no means impossible that the Honourable, who never missed a chance of placing his neck in jeopardy, or the stranger who looked *hard*, might be induced to buy the animal for purposes of tuition. So he ignored all about Adam, and simply said, "It's not a quarter-of-a-mile out of your way to stop at the Rectory; indeed, you go by my stable-yard. Won't you and your friend come in and have a glass of sherry and a biscuit?"

Mr. Sawyer was a man who had no objection to a glass of sherry and a biscuit at any time, let alone such a cheerless day as this. The

hospitable offer, too, was made in so loud a voice that he could not but accept it as addressed to himself; so he drew his horse back to the speaker, and thanked him for the offer, which he expressed his willingness to accept. The Honourable Crasher perceiving that he had been led into the virtual introduction of a man whose name he didn't know, put a bold face on the matter, devoutly hoping the patronymic might never be asked, and the three turned in at a hand-gate, and jogged on amicably through the fog, in the direction of the Rectory.

As Mr. Sawyer ran his eye over the person and appointments of his future host, he could not but acknowledge to himself that never, no, *never* in his life had he seen such a thoroughly *workmanlike* exterior—from the clean-shaved ruddy-face, with its bright-blue eye and close-cropped grey hair, down to the long heavy hunting-spurs, the man was faultless all over. Nobody's leathers were so well-made, so well-cleaned, so well put on as Parson Dove's; and, though he affected brown tops, it is well known that they were such unequalled specimens as to have caused one of his intimate friends who particularly piqued himself on "boots," to give up all hope, even of imitation, and relapse into "Napoleons" in disgust. Why, the very way

he folded his neckcloth was suggestive of Newmarket, and no scarlet coat that was ever turned out by Poole looked so like hunting as that well-cut unassuming black. His open-flapped saddle, his shining stirrup-irons, his heavy double-bridle were all in keeping with the man himself, and it is needless to state that he was riding a thorough-bred bay, with a pair of fired forelegs, and about the best shoulders you ever saw on a hunter.

All this Mr. Sawyer had time to observe ere they rode into a neatly-bricked stable-yard, where they gave their horses to a couple of smart grooms, and followed the owner through the back-door, past the cleanest of kitchens and tidiest of sculleries, into the more aristocratic part of the mansion.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOVE OF THE SAME.

I THINK it is the observant author of "Soapy Sponge," who makes that sporting tourist declare that "women never look so well as when you come home from hunting." Certainly the contrast between a cold cheerless day out-of-doors and the luxurious atmosphere of a well-warmed, well-ventilated house, inclines a man to view everything through a complimentary medium, even without taking into consideration the delightful exchange of a hard slippery saddle for the cushions of a comfortable arm-chair, or the warmth of a blazing fire. The inside of the Rectory was as pretty and as snug as it was possible for any house to be. Parson Dove was one of those men in whom the bump of *comfort* is strongly developed, and whether he bought a warming-pan or a wine-cooler, he was sure to get the best, and the best-looking, article that was to be had for money.

As the three sportsmen clanked along the carpeted passage to the drawing-room, they heard the notes of a piano-forte sounding from that apartment, and Mr. Sawyer had barely time to summon all his fortitude, for the subversion of his constitutional shyness, ere he found himself ushered into that sanctuary, in the wake of the Honourable Crasher, whom, truth to tell, just at that moment, he felt he would have followed with less apprehension over another locked gate, or treacherous "oxer." It was not so formidable an undertaking, after all. There were but two ladies, and both seemed delighted at the acquisition of visitors on so dull a morning. The introductions were got over, none the worse that nobody knew the stranger's name; and both Mrs. Dove, an ample lady, with the remains of considerable beauty, and "My daughter, Cecilia," of whom more anon, seemed resolved to make themselves agreeable to their guests—Mamma rather inclining to the Honourable Crasher, who was an old friend, and had often dropped in to luncheon before; whilst the syren Cecilia, fresh from the execution of that "sweet thing" they had heard on the piano-forte, seemed willing to devote herself to the amusement and possible subjugation of the stranger.

There are some men on whom young ladies feel instinctively they are but wasting their time, and it is curious how seldom their perceptions deceive them on this point. Of such was the Honourable C——. Good-looking, amiable, to all appearance well-off, and not over-burdened with brains, he possessed all the attributes of an "eligible *parti*," and yet somehow the most match-making of mothers, and the most enterprising of daughters, always gave him up as a bad job, after the first ten minutes. There was something about him that betrayed to female shrewdness he was not "a marrying man," and as they judiciously abstain from playing a game in which the loss is not exclusively on the side of the adversary, they let him alone accordingly.

Now, it was otherwise with Mr. Sawyer. Although you and I would have voted him a confirmed bachelor, might even have judged him uncharitably as somewhat rough and unpolished and unrefined, might have scouted the idea of his being in any respect "a ladies' man," and laughed outright at his competing with such a double-distilled dandy as the Honourable C——, we should thus have only exposed our ignorance of the secret springs and impulses that move that mysterious piece of mechanism —the female mind. Miss Dove, in the absence

of any other and nobler game, had not the slightest objection to exercise the different weapons in her armoury on her Mamma's friend's friend.

These were of a sufficiently deadly character. Miss Cecilia—or "Cissy," as they called her at home—without being strictly pretty, was a very attractive young lady. She had a pair of wicked black eyes, with rather thick eyebrows; a high colour; white teeth, which she did not scruple to display on all available occasions; and a laugh so clear and ringing and inspiriting, that it put a man in good humour in spite of himself. Even in the bitterest of frosts, Papa could not be cross for five minutes together, when "Cissy" set to work to tease him into affability. Also, Miss Dove's figure was exceedingly round and symmetrical—not an angle nor a corner in those graceful, flowing lines. Her foot and ankle were undeniable, and her hands white and well-shaped. Altogether, she would have passed muster as good-looking in London: it is needless, therefore, to say that she ought to have been placarded "dangerous" in Leicestershire. Nor had this young woman neglected such opportunities of improving her natural advantages as had come in her way. She could play and sing with much taste and

tolerable skill; she could waltz down a strong man in pretty good training, without drawing her breath quicker for the exertion; she could ride with a degree of nerve and judgment seldom enjoyed by the softer sex; and, finally, she had a way of looking down, to show her long eyelashes, which in many instances had been productive of much loss and confusion to the adversary.

It was, you see, scarcely a fair match to pit all these qualities against honest John Standish Sawyer, with his coarse hands and feet, his short, square-tailed coat, ill-made boots and breeches, red whiskers, and general diffidence.

As he sat before her, with his cap between his feet (I need hardly observe that, like the other ornaments of the Old Country, he wore a velvet hunting-cap), and the horn handle of his whip in his mouth, she took the lead in the conversation; indeed, I am prepared to lay my reader considerable odds, that, whenever he meets a lady and gentleman together, the former is talking, and the latter listening.

Miss Dove began at him without delay:

"You've only just arrived, I hear; and, indeed, what unpromising weather you find us with! I told Papa, this morning, I was sure we shouldn't be able to hunt; and I went and

took my habit off directly after breakfast. If there's one thing I abominate more than another, it's a fog; and at Tilton Wood, too, of all places in the world! I've no idea of leaving a good fire, to go and sit there with the others, like a lot of crows in a mist; and this weather always lasts three days; and to-morrow they meet at the best place they have; and I hope you like our country?"

Mr. Sawyer could not conscientiously affirm that he had yet *seen* it; so he mumbled out an unintelligible answer, and the young lady went off again at score:

"Harborough's getting quite a gay place, I declare. So many gentlemen come there now, to hunt; and it's so convenient for the rail-road; and I dare say you know Mr. Savage, and Captain Struggles, and Major Brush; and *are* you going to give us a Harborough ball?"

Mr. Sawyer was sufficiently experienced to take heart of grace at this juncture, and reply, "Oh, certainly—certainly! I'm sure it will be a capital ball. May we hope, Miss Dove, that you will come to it?"

The eyelashes went down immediately; and Miss D. was, no doubt, on the eve of making an appropriate reply, when the announcement of luncheon, and the simultaneous return of *Pater-*

familias, broke up the pair of *tête-à-têtes*, and the party adjourned to the dining-room, all, apparently, on pretty good terms with themselves—Mr. Sawyer inwardly proud of having got so well out of the ball difficulty; "Cissy" a little elevated with the conviction that she had made a fresh conquest (not that it was any novelty, but the feeling is always more or less agreeable); Papa ready for luncheon, and sanguine about the four-year-old; Mamma enchanted to have caught a good listener; and the Honourable Crasher in his usual state of easy and affable *nonchalance*.

It is only right to observe that the Rev. had exchanged his hunting-costume for a suit of more clerical attire, yet, somehow, had failed to put off with his leathers an atom of his equestrian air. Even in the fullest canonicals, you never could have taken Mr. Dove for anything but a sportsman.

Why are people always so much pleasanter at luncheon than at dinner? Notwithstanding John Bull's predilection for the latter meal, as a mode of testifying his regard, his civility, and his own respectability, I cannot help thinking that foreigners are right to ignore that heavy system of dinner-giving which we islanders regard as the very framework of our social system.

There is always more or less of pomposity, and consequent restraint, attendant upon a regular set dinner in the country. A few thorough people of the world, "worldly," know how to ask exactly the right three couple or so, and put them down to a hot dinner at a round table, such as is the very acme of all festive boards; but this is a rare quality in host and hostess. Usually, you are placed next to a guest you don't know, and opposite to one you don't like. Your soup is cold, your venison underdone; and the eyes of three or four servants intently watching every mouthful you swallow is destruction to a delicate appetite. In some old-fashioned houses, you may even recognise the burly coachman assisting his fellow-domestics to wait upon the company; and although, for my own part, I confess to a liking for "the smell of the stables," I cannot but admit that the flavour is somewhat spoilt by being mixed with that of a "*salmi de gibier*" or a sweetbread plastered round with spinach.

But luncheon, on the contrary, is a light, exhilarating, free-and-easy meal. Even Mr. Sawyer, as he finished his leg of pheasant and glass of brown sherry, felt wonderfully restored by his repast. "Cissy" was a good "doer" (ladies generally are, about two o'clock), and,

till she had disposed of her meal, gave her neighbour a little breathing-time, and leisure to look about him.

I have often thought, although I am by no means the first person who has made the observation, both in and out of print, how true it is that it may be a huge disadvantage to a girl to be seen in company with her mother. It is sometimes discouraging enough to reflect that the coveted treasure must eventually expand into a *fac-simile* of the dragon on guard. Fancy, if the fruit in the Gardens of the Hesperides had been eggs instead of apples, each golden shell inclosing the germ of just such a monster as was grinning at the gate! To be sure, the resemblance may cut the other way as well. I *have* seen mammas whom the fairest of Eve's daughters might be proud to resemble; but it is sometimes hard upon the young Phœbe to have perpetually at her side the shapeless Mother Bunch, into the *fac-simile* of which she must eventually grow. Mr. Sawyer, gazing intently on his hostess discussing her cutlet and glass of port-wine with considerable relish, *acknowledged*, though he would not *accept*, the warning.

Miss Dove took after Mamma rather than Papa. The matron's red face was a brilliant

colour in the girl; and the exuberant proportions of the one, suggestive of good-humour, good living, and motherly content, were but the full, flowing outlines of perfect symmetry in the other.

However, they all got on remarkably well. Even the Honourable Crasher made a feeble joke, of which the point somehow escaped his listeners—without, however, destroying his own enjoyment in its delivery. By the time Papa proposed an adjournment to the stables, to inspect the four-year-old—"Cissy" pleading for two minutes' law, to put her hat on—they were all in high good-humour. If "one spur in the head" be "worth two in the heel," I think it is equally true that a slight stimulant about 1·30 is twice as effectual as a feast at 7·45.

The four-year-old was a fine lengthy, *lashing*-looking young horse, to use a graphic expression, more akin to the kennel than the stable. He had all that thickness of outline and *coarseness* of particular points which sportsmen so like to see, when pedigrees are unimpeachable, and which are sure to grow out into eventual strength and symmetry. Mr. Sawyer would perhaps have admired him more, had his attention not been distracted by the apparition in

the young one's box of the following choice assortment, viz.: One pair of Balmoral-boots (arched instep and pointed heels, after Leech); one scarlet *jupe*, short and full; one morning-gown, very rich and voluminous, tucked and girt up all about ditto; one pair of neat little gloved hands, with tight-fitting bust and arms to match; and one rosy, smiling, happy face; the whole crowned by *such* a hat and feather as said "*Suivez moi!*" far more peremptorily than ever did Henri Quatre's great white *panache*. After that, he looked very little at the four-year-old.

Poor Mr. Sawyer! When his horse was led out, to take him back to Harborough, she patted its grey nose, and called it "*a darling.*" "A darling!" and the ungrateful brute snorted all over her pretty face and hands! Well, he patted its neck himself, as he rode out of the yard.

The day seemed to have improved somehow, though the fog was equally dense, and twilight —or rather no-light—had set in. That cigar, too, which the Honourable gave him just under Langton, he thought, was the best he had ever smoked in his life.

CHAPTER IX.

FOUR O'CLOCK, STABLES.

I SHOULD be sorry for my reader to suppose that John Sawbridge Sawyer was what is termed "a susceptible man." On the contrary, since his well-remembered rejection by Miss Mexico, an event of which it is unnecessary to specify the date, he had steeled himself resolutely against the fair, and devoted his energies, if possible, more exclusively than ever to the worship of Diana. Cold as she is at times, and rigorous as are her icy frowns, corrugating that beaming face into unpropitious wrinkles, at least she is a mistress who never deceives. The thermometer at your dressing-room window tells you exactly the humour in which you will find her, and we do not hear the old, whose season of enjoyment has passed away, regretting the hours and days they have spent in her service. "If I had my time to come over again," I heard a hale octogenarian declare not long ago, "I should make *one* alteration. I should

flirt a little *less* and hunt a great deal *more*." He had been a four-days-a-week man all his life, and in his youth a fierce admirer of the ladies. The foregoing, nevertheless, was the result of his experience.

Mr. Sawyer, like any other male biped, was not above being flattered and pleased by the notice of such a girl as Miss Dove. It smoothed his feathers, so to speak, and encouraged him to think better of himself. The Honourable Crasher, too, who had quite taken a fancy to his new friend, asked him to a *tête-à-tête* dinner at his lodgings on the night after the Tilton Wood meet; and as the wine was remarkably good, and the host, in his sleepy, quiet way, rather pleasant company, he spent an agreeable evening enough.

For the next two or three days there was a catching kind of frost, of the most provoking description, just hard enough to stop hunting, yet with a deceitful appearance of "going" which prevented sportsmen from leaving their quarters for London. During this interregnum Mr. Sawyer had leisure to unpack his things, arrange his books—consisting of "Col. White's Observations on Fox-hunting," "Ask Mamma," (illustrated with coloured prints), and a few back numbers of the "Sporting Magazine,"—

inspect his stables, watch the roan putting on flesh, and the departure of the grey's cough, besides making acquaintance with the persons and studs of Mr. Savage, Captain Struggles, and Major Brush—gentlemen possessing, one and all, an inexhaustible fund of spirits, an untiring delight in horse-flesh, numerous suits of wearing apparel, such as nearly approached the character of fancy dresses, and, to all appearance, a lack of nothing in the world except ready money. They fraternised willingly enough with our friend, smoked cigars with him at his hotel in the morning, took him over their stables at dusk, did *not* try to sell him any of their horses, which would indeed have been a hopeless enterprise, and generally made the world as pleasant for him as was in their power. Mr. Sawyer began to think he had landed in Utopia at last—that he had reached the Happy Land, where, metaphorically speaking, it was to be "beer and skittles" all day long. The only drawback to his felicity was the sustained discontent of old Isaac, and an increasing tendency to inebriety on the part of The Boy.

Perhaps my reader will best understand his situation from a description of a visit paid, according to custom, by the whole gang to the

stables of the Honourable Crasher. Time 4·30, on a dark afternoon, with every appearance of a thaw.

Boadicea, by Bellerophon out of Blue Light, is being stripped for Mr. Sawyer's inspection. As a compliment to the stranger, he is further invited to "walk up to the mare, and feel how fit she is!" at the risk of having his brains dashed out; Boadicea, by Bellerophon out of Blue Light, resenting such liberties with the ferocity of her British namesake, and kicking with considerable energy when her ribs are tickled. Mr. Tiptop, by far too great a man to touch a rug or hood, gives his directions from the offing, with his hat very much over his eyes, removing it only when addressed by his master, his legs very wide apart, and his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his tight trousers.

Captain Struggles, a heavy gentleman, who rides light-weight horses, and wears a shooting suit of the broadest check fabricated, takes a straw out of his mouth, and observes, "That 's about the sort, I think, when you want to do the trick over *this* country. An't it, Tiptop?"

Mr. Tiptop is always mysterious and oracular concerning the Honourable's stud. Somebody, he thinks, ought to preserve the secrets of the stable, and Crasher himself is the most indis-

creet of mortals on such subjects. So the groom raises his hat with both hands, puts it on again, and replies, "We like to get all of *ours* as nearly as possible about that mould. There's a young horse as is quite one of *your* sort, Captain, in the next box." Whereupon Mr. Sawyer, who has no patience with Tiptop, winks at Major Brush, and the latter bursts out laughing.

The conversation now becomes general, and not altogether devoid of personality.

"*Your sort* are rather of the weedy order, Struggles," observes the Major. "Too light for *this* country, as you'll find out before you're many days older, now that we've got the ground, to ride as it should do, up to our girths. Besides, those thoro'-bred rips never have courage to face large fences. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Sawyer?"

The Major has not yet forgiven Struggles for stopping him on the last day they were out, at the only practicable place in a bull-finch, on which the heavy weight and a very little chesnut stallion were see-sawing backwards and forwards, like some exquisitely-balanced piece of machinery. Mr. Sawyer, thus appealed to, gives his opinion, thinking of the roan the while: "They *must* have power, I fancy, for these flying countries, but they must have blood

too. I should like to show you a horse I've just bought, that I mean to hunt to-morrow if the frost goes. My stables are 'close at hand.'"

It is resolved that Mr. Sawyer's shall be the next stud inspected; but such an unheard-of breach of etiquette as leaving their present haunt until every individual horse has been stripped, cannot be entertained for a moment; so Mr. Savage, in his turn, enlivens the process by attacking poor Struggles: "You never got to the end that Keythorpe day, after all," says he. "What's the use of these long pedigrees of yours, if they can't stay? I have always understood their only merit as hunters is, that you can't *tire* the thoro'-bred ones. But confess now, Struggles, you stopped before the hounds ran through the Coplow!"

"No distance at all!" chimes in Brush.

"And the ground must have been quite light before the rain," adds Mr. Sawyer, who thinks he *must* say something, and who has not been permitted to remain in ignorance of this Keythorpe day, now more than a fortnight old.

Struggles turned from one to the other of his tormentors, with a grin on his jolly face. "Little Benjamin couldn't have been so beat, when I caught your horse for you," said he to Brush; "or when I went by *you*, Savage, in

the lane, and that was after five-and-twenty minutes, with fifteen stone on his back, amongst those hills. No, no, my boys! Fair play's a jewel, and neither of you were there to see whether I'd had my gruel or not. *Stop* indeed! I'd lay odds none of old Catamaran's stock would cut up soft, if you rode them till the day after to-morrow. Stop! I'll be hanged if I didn't *trot* when I got on the high-road coming home."

"Never mind! we know," interposed Mr. Savage—a tall pale man, with a hawk's eye that nothing escaped. "Why, you were *seen*, my good fellow!—*seen* with your own back against your horse's, shoving him through a fence. They said if you hadn't been the heaviest of the two, you'd have been there now."

Like almost all stout men, Struggles was the essence of good-humour. He burst into a hearty laugh, but persevered in his denial. "*Who* saw me?" said he; "who saw me? He must have been in a right good place, though I say it."

"Parson Dove saw you," rejoined his accuser. Whereat Mr. Sawyer felt his heart give a thump. "Parson Dove made a capital story about it. He said he never saw a horse so

badly in with so heavy a backer. I shouldn't wonder if he put it in his sermon on Sunday. However, he'll be out to-morrow—he and Miss Cissy, and the lot of 'em. I'll appeal to him if what I say isn't true."

Mr. Sawyer listened attentively. Then he should see Miss Dove again on the following day, and in the enjoyment of what she had confided to him was a favourite pastime. Involuntarily he found himself thinking of the black eyes, with their long eyelashes, and wondering whether she would look well in a riding-habit.

Meantime the Honourable Crasher, in the last stage of exhaustion, was endeavouring to discover which of his horses Tiptop would let him ride on the morrow. The fixture was at a capital place with the Pytchley, and promised a large field. Notwithstanding his *insouciance*, the Honourable C. could not but feel that he should like something both safe and fast, if, as was more than possible, he would have to ride for his life during the first ten minutes.

"Tiptop," said his master, raising himself from his seat on the corn-bin, and taking the cigar from his lips, "Tiptop, as they're all pretty fit, you may send on Catamount and Confidence to-morrow."

"Catamount's hardly got over his physic yet, and I'm keeping Confidence for you on Thursday," replied the master of the horse.

"Well, then, the mare and old Plantagenet?" urged the Honourable. "I can ride Plantagenet first, and send him home by two o'clock."

"The mare's had a gallop this morning, and we wants Plantagenet second 'oss for Friday," objected Mr. Tiptop.

"Well, then, Life Boat," pleaded the proprietor. "I haven't had a ride on Life Boat this season. And, let me see, the Banker would do very well for second."

"I thought of Topsy-Turvy and Chance," enunciated Mr. Tiptop, somewhat imperiously; and the Honourable's face lengthened considerably at the announcement. To do him justice, he was one of those sportsmen so well described in the old Cheshire hunting song—

"———— to whom nought comes amiss—
One horse or another, that country or this;
Who through falls and bad starts undauntedly still
Ride up to the motto—*Be with them I will!*"

But Bellerophon himself was mortal, and Topsy Turvy was a *very* awkward mare to ride in a crowd. With great pace and jumping powers she had all the irritability of her high-

born race, and more than all the jealousy of her sex. Horses in her rear annoyed her—alongside, or in front, they drove her mad: so she was never thoroughly comfortable, unless sailing away by herself with the hounds—a place, it is only fair to add, that she was quite capable of keeping. Chance, by Gamester out of Happy-go-lucky, was no safer a mount. Just out of training, she went nevertheless at her fences with considerable audacity; but was prone to over-jump herself when she didn't run through them. As Struggles observed of her, "It was a safe bet to lay five to two on the Caster."

However, the Honourable never dreamed for an instant of disputing Mr. Tiptop's *fiat;* so he consoled himself by thinking what a start he *would* get! and how he hoped the hounds would keep out of his way. By the time Topsy-Turvy's clothes had been replaced, and a handsome pony examined and approved of, the party, much to old Isaac's disgust, adjourned to Mr. Sawyer's stables, where they were good enough to express their approval of the roan and his companions in that conventional tone which is so much less flattering than one of sincere abuse. These gentlemen hardly knew Mr. Sawyer well enough yet to give their honest

opinion; and perhaps it was fortunate for the sake of Isaac's peace of mind that they did not.

"*Useful* horses, Sawyer!" observed Mr. Savage, considerately sparing the groom the labour of stripping them.

"*Useful* horses," repeated Captain Struggles and Major Brush in a breath; the latter adding, "and seem pretty fit to go." While the Honourable Crasher, who had not ventured farther than the door, remarked that he "thought Jack-a-Dandy the best shaped one of the lot;" but conceded, in a faint whisper, that the rest of them looked "very like hunters: remarkably *useful* horses indeed!"

Our friend was not deficient in penetration, and by no means a person to have been nearly a week in The Shires without finding out what this epithet means. "When a man tells me he has got a *useful* horse," Mr. Sawyer was once heard to observe, "I interpret it that he is the owner of a *useless brute*, which he wishes to sell *me!*" And Mr. Sawyer was not deceived by the politeness of his companions. He held his tongue, however; but more than once he caught himself brooding over the offensive adjective during the evening.

"If the roan is only half as good as I take him to be, and I can but get a start to-morrow,"

thought our friend, "I'll show them what my *useful* horse can do! Miss Dove will be out, too, and that cursed fellow of Putty's hasn't sent down my new boots! Never mind—I've got the right spurs at any rate, and it won't be my fault to-morrow if I don't 'go for the gloves,' as we used to say in the Old Country."

He dined at home, and reduced the allowance of sherry considerably; also consumed but one of the Laranagas before going to roost at the sober hour of 10·30. Mr. Sawyer seldom took his nervous system into consideration; but on this occasion, with all his self-confidence (and he had as much as his neighbours), he was indeed resolved not to throw a chance away.

CHAPTER X.

"HAIL! SMILING MORN!"

WHEN we read in *Bell's Life*, the *Morning Post*, or the Northampton paper, that the Pytchley hounds will meet on Wednesday at Crick, we confess to the same sensation which the old coachman is said to experience at the crack of the whip. We call up a picture tinged by the glowing colours of a memory that Time has no power to fade. It seems again to be a soft-eyed morning in the mild winter or the early spring, and the sky is dappled with serene and motionless clouds; whilst here below, a faint breeze from the south whispers of promised fragrance, only biding its time to exude from Earth's teeming bosom—she sleeps the mighty mother; but even in repose she is clad in majestic beauty, and instinct with vitality and hope. On such a morning the blood dances through their veins, and her children would fain leap and shout aloud for joy. What freshness in the smell of the saturated pastures! What

thought our friend, "I'll show them what my *useful* horse can do! Miss Dove will be out, too, and that cursed fellow of Putty's hasn't sent down my new boots! Never mind—I've got the right spurs at any rate, and it won't be my fault to-morrow if I don't 'go for the gloves,' as we used to say in the Old Country."

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clock points to five minutes before eleven, as we bid the cheery huntsman "Good morning," and exchange our hack for our hunter.

Mr. Sawyer probably felt very much the sort of sensations I have endeavoured to describe, as he dashed along on the free-going "Dandy," in company with some of his new companions. If so, he kept them to himself. Our friend was a man of few words at the best of times; and when, as in the present instance, "big with high resolve," taciturnity personified. Also, notwithstanding the want of the new boots, he had "got himself up" to-day with peculiar care. The result, I am bound to admit, was not entirely satisfactory; and when that is the case, a man's loquacity is apt to decrease in proportion. However, the roan, or "Hotspur," as we must now call him, made a pretty good figure, as far as appearance went, even amongst a bevy of celebrated hunters, and his master felt a considerable accession of confidence when he found himself fairly mounted and ready for the fray. Miss Dove, too had arrived in company with her papa. There was no doubt about it: she *did* look remarkably well in her riding-habit.

Mr. Sawyer, a little nervous, and rather ashamed of it, doffed the velvet hunting-cap, and rode up to accost her. I need scarcely

observe that the young lady's greeting was of the coldest and most reserved. The last time she had been all smiles and sunshine: so, on the principle of rotation, to-day must be one of frigidity and decorum. It's a way they have, you see; and one that seldom fails to put the inexperienced to utter confusion. A man cannot be said to know what the ague really is, till he has suffered from the fits—both hot and cold. Take warning, John Standish Sawyer! you who have once before burnt your fingers, and had cause to dread the fire. Miss Mexico, with her quadroon stain and her thirty thousand pounds, was a queerish one to manage; but she was a fool to Miss Dove.

"Confound the girl! what does she mean by it?" said the humiliated swain to himself, as the hounds moved off towards the gorse. He felt a little disgusted, and *not* a little irritated: just in the humour that makes a man ready for a bit of excitement rather keener than ordinary. He thought he had never felt *so like riding* in his life before! With the natural instinct of one who knew himself capable of going in the first-flight, the observant Sawyer proceeded to scan narrowly such of the surrounding sportsmen as looked to him like "meaning mischief." Out of a hundred riders it was not so difficult as

might be supposed to pick a proportion of flyers, and the proportion, as my hunting readers will not dispute, was little over ten per cent. Shall I name them? Shall I add ninety enterprising and energetic gentlemen to the list of my mortal enemies? Heaven forbid that I should do anything so invidious and ill-advised! Mr. Sawyer did not know them, and why should I? Each of the hundred, doubtless believed himself one of the chosen ten. I fancy that every man who goes out hunting thinks he only wants an opportunity to show his back to the rest of the field. I fancy that when the opportunity *does* come, he lets it slip in hopes of a better, and that no one attributes to want of nerve, horsemanship, or common sense, that failure, on which it would be no bad investment to offer each equestrian nine to one! Well, everybody has an equal chance on a fine scenting day, when the fox has slipped quietly away, by good fortune only seen by a countryman, with a quinsy, who couldn't halloo to save his life. When the two or three couple of leading hounds have flashed a hundred yards or so over his line, thus enabling the body of the pack to join them, and stoop all together to the scent, when after a cheery twang, the huntsman returns his horn to its case, and the master, relieved, for an instant, from the weight

of care, which none but an M. F. H. knows, takes his place alongside of his favourites, and observes mentally, though he wouldn't say it aloud for a thousand, "Now, my fine fellows, ride on their backs if you *can!*" In short, at that delicious moment when the wise bethink them of a fox's point, and a convenient lane, and the enthusiasts glance exultingly at each other, and say, "All right, old fellow! I *think* we're landed!" then hath each a fair field and no favour; and if a man's hardihood, or his vanity, or his ambition prompt him to assume a place in the front rank, he has nothing to do but go and try.

As Mr. Sawyer rode down to the Gorse, he was pleased to feel Hotspur step so lightly and vigorously under him. The horse shook his bit, and cocked his ears, and reached at his bridle to get near the hounds. He *felt* like a good one, and we all know what confidence that sensation imparts to the rider. Mr. Sawyer forgot all about Miss Dove, and the unprovoked manner in which she had snubbed him. It was cheerful to hear one or two complimentary remarks exchanged between the passing sportsmen.

"That's a clever horse," said a tall heavy man, himself admirably mounted, indicating the

roan with a nod, and addressing a supercilious-looking person in a black coat, whose attention was much taken up with the appearance of his own legs and feet, which he was looking at alternately *en profile.*

"Rather," answered the supercilious person, glancing up for an instant from his occupation—"Who's the man? Never saw such a man; never saw such boots; never saw a fellow so badly got up altogether."

At this juncture the Honourable Crasher, cantering by on Topsy-Turvy, accosted our friend with good-humoured familiarity, and the supercilious man changing his mind all in a moment, about Mr. Sawyer and his boots, resolved to take the first opportunity of making the stranger's acquaintance. In effect he followed the last comer to prosecute this intention. The Honourable C. disappearing through a bull-finch, on Topsy-Turvy, whom he thus hoped to put in good humour, was ere this in a field alongside of the hounds, which he was likely to have all to himself.

Soon a hand-gate stems the increasing cavalcade, and the stoppage becoming more obstinate, owing to Mr. Sawyer's abortive attempts to open the same, a good deal of conversation, rhetorical rather than complimentary, is the result.

"Put your whip *under* the latch," says one.

"Got the wrong hand to it," sneers another.

"What a tarnation muff!" vociferates a third.

"Ware heels!" exclaims a fourth, as a wicked little bay mare, in the thick of them, lets out with unerring precision; and one man says, "What a shame it is to bring such a devil as that into a crowd!" and another opines that "The kick will be out of her before two o'clock!" and the owner, profuse in apologies, is only thinking of slipping through the gate, and going on to get a start.

Meanwhile Hotspur makes himself profoundly ridiculous, pushing the gate when the latch is down, and wincing from it when he ought to shove; also finding himself totally unassisted by the crook of his master's whip, which keeps slipping on the wet green wood, waxes irritable, rears up, and threatens to vary the entertainment, by performing a somersault into the next field.

"Let me do it for you, sir," says a good-natured young farmer; and Mr. Sawyer wisely abandons his office of door-keeper, and after about forty people have hustled by him, manages at last to edge his way through.

By this time the hounds have been put into the gorse. Nineteen couple are they of *ladies*,

with the cleanest of heads and necks, straight and fair on their legs and feet as so many ballet-dancers, and owning that keen wistful look, which is so peculiar to the countenance of the fox-hound. They dash into the covert as if sure of finding, and Parson Dove, standing erect in his stirrups, watches them with a glow of pleasure lighting up his clean-shaved face. "There's a fox, Charles, I'll lay a bishopric!" says he, and a whimper from Truelove confirms the parson's opinion on the spot.

"Not a doubt on it! sir, not a doubt on it! one if not a brace!" replies that functionary, with immense rapidity. He loses very little time indeed, at his phrases, or his fences, or anything else. In another moment he is up to his girths in the gorse, cheering on the beauties, who are working up the scent with a vast deal of musical energy. The master casts an uneasy glance at the crowd; countless anxieties and apprehensions cross his mind. One way the fox will be headed, another the hounds will be cut off, a third leads up to the village, and we all know how fatal are houses and pigsties at the commencement of a run. But the fourth side is clear; happily the hounds are even now bustling eagerly towards it.

Diverse occupations engross the attention of

the field, few of them seem to be much taken up with the business in hand. Here a gentleman is giving a farmer's horse a gallop, preparatory, as it would appear, to a purchase. There another is detailing the last news from Warwickshire, to an applauding audience. Struggles, on his feet, is adjusting a snaffle-bridle more comfortably on the head of a game little thorough-bred. Savage is discussing the merits of a new novel with a literary friend. Major Brush is taking up a link in Miss Dove's curb-chain; that damsel, very killing indeed, in a little hat and feathers, is surrounded by admirers, and yet *lassata nondum satiata* is inwardly regretting that she had snubbed poor Mr. Sawyer so gratuitously at the meet. You see, however low one may rate the value of his vassalage, still a victim always counts *for one;* and it is a pity needlessly to throw away the veriest weed that helps to make up one's chaplet. Truth to tell, Mr. Sawyer was not thinking about her. He had crept on, as he thought, unobserved, to a place from which he could command the proceedings, and try to get a good start. Nevertheless, a watchful eye was on his movements. The master was even then deliberating whether he should holloa to him to "Come back, sir," and was hoping in his own

mind, "that chap in a cap wouldn't go on, and head the fox!"

The Honourable Crasher and Topsy-Turvy had already fallen out, as to a cigar, which the former wanted to light. No! the mare would *not* stand still, and an impatient jerk at the curb-rein had not tended to adjust this difference. So she was backing and sidling and shaking her head, and making herself intensely disagreeable, whilst the Honourable, who soon recovered his equanimity, scanned a certain stile just in front of her with a critical eye, and employed herself by vaguely calculating how many yards before she came to it she was likely, in her present humour, to "take off;" also whereabouts he should land if they *did* make a mess of it, and whether *more* than two or three fellows would be on his back at once.

He has by no means solved the problem, when a violent rush is made towards the lane. Somebody has seen somebody else gallop, who has seen a sheep-dog run; this is a sufficient reason for some eighty or ninety horsemen to charge furiously in the same direction; their leaders finding no hounds then pull up, and the crowd proceed leisurely back again. But this false alarm has been in favour of the fox, who perceiving a clear space before him, and having

obtained, by a dexterous turn round the covert, a little law of his pursuers, takes advantage of the lull, to slip away unobserved by any one but the first whip, and that official is far too discreet to make a noise. He telegraphs mutely to the huntsman, who has *the ladies* out of covert, and dashing to the front, with three blasts of his horn. Ere the Honourable Crasher has had time to indulge Topsy-Turvy with a fling at the stile, which she jumps as if there was a ten-foot drain on each side, the pack are settled to the scent, and racing away a clear field a-head of every one but the huntsman and whip. The Honourable Crasher, however, is coming up hand-over-hand, Topsy-Turvy laying herself out in rattling form. The master, with a backward glance at the crowd, is alongside of him, and Mr. Sawyer sailing over the first fence, in such good company, with a tight hold of his horse's head, and an undeniable start, thinks he is "really in for it at last!"

CHAPTER XI.

"A MERRY GO-ROUNDER."

A MILE-AND-A-HALF of grass, some six or eight fences, and the sustained brilliancy of the pace, have had their usual effect on the moving panorama. A turn in his favour, of which his old experience has prompted him to take every advantage, enables Mr. Sawyer to pull Hotspur back to a trot, and look about him. He is in a capital place, and has every reason to believe the new horse is "a flyer." Hitherto, he has only asked him to gallop, best pace, over sound turf, and take a succession of fair hunting fences in his stride. Hotspur seems to know his business thoroughly, and though a little eager, he allows his rider to draw him together for his leaps, and the way in which he cocks his ears when within distance denotes a hunter. Mr. Sawyer is full of confidence. He has been riding fence for fence with the Honourable Crasher, whose pale face wears a smile of quiet satisfaction. The latter has indulged Topsy-Turvy

with two awkward bits of timber, and an unnecessary gate; the mare is consequently tolerably amiable, and, though she throws her head wildly about if any other horse comes near her, may be considered in an unusually composed frame of mind. The huntsman has been riding close to his hounds, in that state of eager anxiety which the philosopher would hardly consider enjoyment, and yet which is nevertheless not without its charms: all his feelings are reflected, in a modified form, in the breast of the master. The latter, riding his own line, as near the pack as his conscience will permit him, is divided between intense enjoyment of the gallop and a host of vague apprehensions lest anything should turn up to mar the continuance of the run. He has already imbibed a qualified aversion for Mr. Sawyer, whom the instinct peculiar to his office prompts him to suspect as "a likely fellow to press them at a check;" while he knows his friend Crasher so well, as to feel there is but one chance with that mild enthusiast, viz., that Topsy-Turvy should come to a difficulty before the hounds do. Besides these four, Captain Struggles and Major Brush are very handy, whilst Mr. Savage heads another detachment in the next field, of which Miss Dove, riding with considerable grace, is at once the ornament

and the admiration. Her father has lost his place from a fall, but is coming up with steady skill and energy, going as straight as if he were close to the hounds, and ready to take every advantage. At the first turn in his favour he will be with them as if nothing had happened. In addition to these, many score of sportsmen are scattered over the neighbouring district, and a serried mass of scarlet, which may be termed not inaptly, "the heavy brigade," is moving in close column down a distant lane.

All this our friend observes at a glance, but his attention is soon arrested by the business in his front.

The hounds, having over-run the scent a trifle, swing to the line again with dashing confidence, and take it up once more with an energy that seems but increased by their momentary hesitation.

They might have been covered by a sheet hitherto: now they lengthen out into a string, and the leaders scour along, with their noses in the air and their sterns lowered. Every yard increases their distance from the pursuing horsemen.

They are pointing to a dead flat surface of old yellow grass, with patches of rushes and ant-hills interspersed. There would appear to be a

mile or more of plain without a fence; but Mr. Sawyer spies a tell-tale willow here and there, and he wishes in his heart that he was quite sure Hotspur could jump water!

Presently the hounds disappear, and emerge again, throwing their tongues as they take to running, and looking darker and less distinct than before.

"Is there a ford, Charles?" halloos Major Brush, who has shaken to the front, and would fain continue there without a wetting.

"Never a one for miles," answers Charles with inconceivable rapidity, catching his horse by the head, and performing a running accompaniment with his spurs.

In a few seconds he is over with a considerable effort, a certain scramble and flourish when they land, showing there are very few inches to spare.

The ill-fated Major has no idea of refusing. His horse, however, thinks differently; so they compromise the matter by sliding in together, and climbing out separately, draggled, disgusted, and bemired.

"There is no mistake about it," thinks Mr. Sawyer; "I must jump or else go home!" He may take a liberty, he hopes, with a friend; so he puts the roan's head close behind the

Honourable Crasher, and devoutly trusting that gentleman will get over, drives Hotspur resolutely at the brook.

Topsy-Turvy, wild with excitement, throws her head in the air, and takes off a stride too soon. Consequently she drops her hind-legs, and rolls into the opposite field. The roan, who jumps as far as ever he can, lands on Crasher's reins, of which the latter never lets go, and drives them into the turf.

"Line, sir! line!" expostulates the Honourable, not knowing who it is. "Oh! it's you, is it?" he adds, picking himself up, and re-mounting. "All right! Go along, old fellow! The hounds are running like smoke!"

Mr. Sawyer apologises freely as they gallop on. In his heart he thinks Crasher the best fellow he ever met, and contrasts his behaviour with that of Sir Samuel Stuffy in the Old Country, on whom he once played the same trick, and whose language in return was more Pagan than Parliamentary.

The master and Struggles get over also, the latter not without a scramble. Those who are not in the first flight wisely diverge towards a bridge. For five minutes and more there are but half-a-dozen men with the hounds. These run harder than ever for another mile, then

throw their heads up, and come to an untoward check.

"What a pity!" exclaims Mr. Sawyer. Not that he thinks so exactly, for Hotspur wants a puff of wind sadly.

"Turned by them sheep!" says Charles, and casts his hounds rapidly forward and down wind. No; he has not been turned by the sheep: he has been coursed by a dog. Charles wishes every dog in the country was with Cerberus, except the nineteen couple now at fault.

"Pliant has it," observes the master, as Pliant, feathering down the side of a hedge, makes sure she is right, and then flings a note or two off her silvery tongue, to apprise her gossips of the fact. They corroborate her forthwith, and the chorus of female voices could scarce be outdone at a christening. Nevertheless, they are brought to hunting now, and must feel for it every yard they go.

But this interval has allowed some twenty equestrians, amongst whom a graceful form in a habit is not the least conspicuous, to form the chase once more. Great is the talking and self-gratulations. Watches are even pulled out, and perspiring arrivals announce the result of their observations, each man timing the burst to the moment at which he himself came up.

"How well your horse carried you!" said a soft voice at Mr. Sawyer's elbow; "didn't he, papa?" added the syren, appealing to the Reverend Dove, who was eagerly watching the hounds. "We all agreed that the velvet cap had the best of it."

She wanted to make amends to him for her rudeness in the morning, and this was the opportunity to choose. The hardest male heart is sufficiently malleable under the combined influence of heat, haste, and excitement, though how this girl should have made the discovery it is beyond my ingenuity to guess. How do they discover a thousand things, of which we believe them to be ignorant?

Mr. Sawyer smiled his gratitude, as he opened a gate for the lady, and very nearly let it swing back against her knees. He had not acquired sufficient practice yet at his gates, that's the truth; and perhaps there were other portals wherein his inexperience had better have forbidden him to venture. Miss Dove was fast luring him into a country which, to use a hunting metaphor, was very cramped and blind, full of "doubles," "squire-traps," and other pitfalls for the unwary.

Hounds are apt to be a little unsettled after so rapid a burst as I have attempted to describe,

and it takes a few fields of persevering attention to steady them again. After this, however, I think we may have remarked they make but few mistakes, and a fox well rattled, up to the first check, huntsmen tell us, is as good as half killed.

The description of a run is tedious to all but the narrator. What good wine a man should give his guests, who indulges in minute details of every event that happened!—how they entered this spinny, and skirted that wood, and crossed the common, and finally killed or lost, or ran to ground, or otherwise put an end to the proceedings of which the reality is so engrossing and the account so tedious. I have seen young men, longing to join the ladies, or pining for their cigars, forced to sit smothering their yawns as they pretended to take an interest in the hounds and the huntsman, and the country, and their host's own doings, and that eternal black mare. I can stand it well enough myself, with a fair allowance of '41 or '44, by abstracting my attention completely from the narrative, and wandering in the realms of fancy, cheered by the blushing fluid. But every one may not enjoy this faculty, and you cannot in common decency, go fast asleep in your Amphitryon's face. Again, I say, nothing

but good wine will wash the infliction down. Let him, then, whose port is new, or his claret unsound, beware how he thus trespasses on the forbearance of his guests.

Of course they killed their fox. After the first check they gradually took to hunting, and so to running once more, Mr. Sawyer distinguishing himself by describing a very perfect semicircle with Hotspur, over some rails near Stanford Hall. The roan was tired, and his rider ambitious, so a downfall was the inevitable result. Nevertheless, he fell honourably enough, and hoped no one but himself knew how completely the accident was occasioned by utter exhaustion on the part of his steed.

There is no secret so close as that between a horse and his rider. Up to the first check, Hotspur had realised his owner's fondest anticipations. "He's fit for a king!" ejaculated the delighted Sawyer, when they flew so gallantly over the brook. Even after the hounds had run steadily on for the best part of an hour, the animal's character had only sunk to "not thoroughly fit to go;" but when they arrived at the Hemplow Hills and the pack, still holding a fair hunting pace, breasted that choking ascent, he could not disguise from himself that the roan was about "told out." They are indeed no

joke, those well-known Hemplow Hills, when they present themselves to astonished steeds and ardent riders after fifty minutes over the strongest part of Northamptonshire. A sufficiently picturesque object to the admirer of nature, they prove an unwelcome obstacle to the follower of the chase, and it was no disgrace to poor Hotspur that, although he struggled gamely to the top, he was reduced to a very feeble and abortive attempt at a trot when he reached the flat ground on the summit. Ere long this degenerated to a walk; and I leave it to my reader, if a sportsman, to imagine with what feelings of relief Mr. Sawyer observed the now distant pack turning short back. The fox was evidently hard pressed, and dodging for his life.

The Rev. Dove, with an exceedingly red face, a broken stirrup-leather, and a dirty coat, viewed him crawling slowly down the side of a hedge-row. In an instant his hat was in the air, and Charles, surrounded by his hounds, was galloping to the point indicated. Two sharp turns with the fox in sight—a great enthusiasm and hurry amongst those sportsmen who were fortunate enough to be present, and who *rode* one and all considerably faster than their horses could go—a confused mass of hounds

rolling over each other in the corner of a field —Charles off his horse, and amongst them, with a loud "Who-whoop"—and the run is concluded, to the satisfaction of all lookers-on, and the irremediable disgust of the many equestrians who started "burning with high hope," and are now struggling and stopping over the adjoining parish, in different stages of exhaustion. The Honourable Crasher congratulates Mr. Sawyer on his success; also takes this opportunity of introducing his friend to the M. F. H. A few courteous sentences are interchanged; Messrs. Savage, Struggles, and Brush propose a return to Harborough; cigars are offered and lit; everybody seems pleased and excited. John Standish Sawyer has attained the object for which he left home—he has seen a good run, made a number of pleasant acquaintances, launched once more into that gay world, which he now thinks he abandoned too soon. He *ought* to be delighted with his success; but, alas for human triumphs!

> "Ay! even in the fount of joy,
> Some bitter drops the draught alloy;"

and our friend, with many feigned excuses, and a dejected expression of countenance, lingers behind his companions, and plods his way homewards alone.

CHAPTER XII.

"DEAD FOR A DUCAT."

It is needless for me to observe that Mr. Sawyer was one of those individuals who are described in common parlance as not having been "born yesterday." He had lived long enough in this superficial world of ours to recognise the prudence of "keeping his own counsel," just as he kept the key of his own cellar at The Grange; and he would no more have thought of entrusting his dearest friend with the one than the other.

Accordingly, when he felt certain ominous thumps against the calves of his legs, which denoted that "Hotspur was suffering from palpitation of the heart," he resolved to conceal if possible from every eye that untoward failing of so good an animal. And, with considerable judgment, he waited till his friends were out of sight ere he dismounted, and led his jaded steed into a barn, which he espied at hand,

there to recover himself a little under shelter, and then if possible to make his way home in the dark, and trust to chance for some excuse to account for his delay, when he met them again at the dinner-table.

Perhaps the reason is, that in these fast times condition is so much better understood—for we cannot admit the uncomplimentary excuse that hounds do not run now as formerly—why horses *stop* so much less often in the hunting field than they did in the palmy days of Musters and Assheton Smith, and "the d—d Quornites," who were always either "showing" or "being shown the *trick*" some fifty years ago. *Then* a hunter's reputation was as fragile as a sultana's, and was guarded as jealously. Not only must he be "*sans peur*," but also "*sans reproche.*" And the efforts of these lords to preserve the character of their treasures were as ingenious as they were ludicrous. One facetious nobleman actually got a tired favourite home next day right through the streets of Melton, disguised as the middle horse of a cart-team; nor did all the lynx-eyes, ready to watch for the "casualties" consequent on a clipper, discover the identity of one of the best nags in Leicestershire, under the weather-beaten winkers and shabby harness of a four-horse waggon. Mr.

Sawyer trusted to the cloud of night for the same immunity.

He had just stabled his steed in the warmest corner of the shed, and, having taken off his own coat to fling over the animal's heaving quarters, was beginning to speculate on the probable rheumatism that would succeed this imprudence, when, to his astonishment and disgust, the door was darkened by another figure, and his solitude disturbed by the entrance of a man and horse, in all probability seeking the same shelter for the same cause.

The new-comer was a remarkably good-looking person, extremely well got-up, particularly as regarded his nether extremities, and our friend at once recognised him as having been very forward with the hounds at different stages of the run. His horse, a well-bred bay, was "done to a turn." When Sawyer looked at its drooping head and heaving flanks, it seemed to put him quite in conceit with the roan. For a moment neither spoke a word—then the absurdity of the situation seemed to strike them simultaneously, and they both burst out laughing.

"What? They've cooked *your* goose as well as mine!" said the stranger, in off-hand tones, producing at the same time a silver cigar-case,

on which our friend could not help fancying he descried a coronet, and proceeding to light a most tempting-looking weed.

"A very likely day to do it, too," he added, glancing, as Sawyer thought, somewhat contemptuously at himself and steed. "The pace for the first twenty minutes was *alarming*, and the country awfully deep. I should say you 'll hardly get that horse home to-night."

The suggestion was neither flattering nor consolatory. Mr. Sawyer felt half-inclined to be offended; but he thought of the silver cigar-case, and swallowed the retort uncourteous that rose to his lips. He was a true Briton, and not above a weakness for the peerage. "This good-looking man," he argued, "notwithstanding his black coat, must be a Viscount at least!"

"I 'm only going as far as Market Harborough," he observed, meekly. "It cannot be more than seven or eight miles. I shall hope to accomplish that."

"Lucky for *you!*" replied the other. "I want to get to Melton, if I can. I've a hack here at Welford, if this beggar can take me there. He 's short of work, poor devil! and could hardly wag coming up the hill. I should say *your* horse would die."

This was an unpleasant and rather startling

way of putting the matter. Mr. Sawyer had not indeed considered it from that point of view. Though a man of energy, he felt somewhat helpless; as who would not, in a similar position? Eight miles from home, in a strange country, encumbered with a dying horse!

"What had I better do?" enquired he, rather plaintively, of the unknown.

Nobleman though he were, the latter seemed to be an energetic personage enough, and pretty familiar with the usages of the stable. Between them they made poor Hotspur as comfortable as circumstances would admit, the unknown conversing with great condescension and volubility the whole time.

"What you want for this country," said he, rubbing away the while at Hotspur's ears and forehead, "is a strong stud. If you've sport hereabouts, it pulls the horses so to pieces. Now this is a nice little well-bred horse enough, but he hasn't *size*, you see, and scope; there's nothing of him; consequently, when you drop into a run, he goes as long as he *can*, and then it's all U P! *Mine*, now, would have gone on for ever, if he'd had *condition*; but I only bought him ten days ago, and he's never had a gallop. Nothing like *good* ones—*big* ones—

and plenty of 'em! Look at him now, he's getting better every moment."

Without subscribing entirely to this statement, Mr. Sawyer humbly asked his new friend if he himself was very strong in horses?

"Not *very*," was the reply. "I've got eleven, however, at my place, which I shall be very happy to show you whenever you like to come over. Every one of them up to more than your weight," he added, casting his eye over Mr. Sawyer's much-bemired figure. "I shall be happy to give you a mount on any one of them you fancy; and you will know them better than I can tell you."

Our friend was penetrated with gratitude. Visions stole over him of an eligible acquaintance, that would soon ripen into friendship, with this most affable of peers; of a charming country-house, agreeable women, billiards, music, dry champagne, and flirtation—himself an honoured guest; of an introduction, perhaps, through his noble ally, into the best London society and everything that he had always thought most desirable, but hitherto considered beyond his reach. "Doubtless," reasoned Mr. Sawyer, "he has remarked *my riding*, and taken a fancy to me. On further observation, he finds my manners are those of a perfect

gentleman; and he is determined we shall become friends. How lucky Hotspur was so beat that I came in here!"

Accordingly, he thanked his new acquaintance with considerable *empressement*, and assured him that "he should take the first opportunity of taxing his hospitality."

The unknown looked a little astonished. "Well," he replied, "if you don't mind roughing it a bit, I dare say I can find room for you, even in *my* little crib; but you can see the horses out hunting, and ride them too, just the same."

"How considerate these noblemen are!" thought Mr. Sawyer, "and how playful! I dare say his 'little crib,' as he calls it, is three times the size of The Grange. But he insists on mounting me, all the same." So he thanked him once more, and proposed that, as it was dark, and the horses were somewhat recovered, they should endeavour to make their way home.

"When will you come?" asked the unknown, as they emerged into the open air—both horses coughing, one lame before, and the other all round. "I've a bay that would carry you admirably, and a brown, and, indeed, a chesnut that you would like. I'd take five hundred for

the three; and they're so perfect, a child might ride them."

"What a cordial, good fellow!" thought Mr. Sawyer again. "He wishes me to enjoy my visit, and ride his horses with thorough confidence; so he tells me of their great value and perfect tuition. I have indeed 'lit upon my legs,' as the saying is." "Thank you," he replied aloud, "My time is my own; and I will pay you a visit whenever it is perfectly convenient to you to receive me. My name is Sawyer; and I am staying at Harborough. Perhaps you will kindly write, and let me know."

"Very well, sir," answered the other, muttering something about "business," but touching his hat, as Mr. Sawyer thought, with all the politeness of the old school, as their ways diverged; and he jogged off to get his hack, leaving our friend to plod on a-foot by the exhausted Hotspur, in the darkening twilight, cheered but by one solitary star, which threatened to be soon eclipsed by the clouds that were rising fast in the sighing night-wind.

It was no such enviable position, after all. Seven miles at least had Mr. Sawyer to go; and he must walk, or ride at a foot's pace, every yard of the way. The sky was ominous of

rain ; the Laranagas were all smoked out ; and poor Hotspur was unquestionably "done to a turn."

These are the moments which the most thoughtless of men cannot but devote to reflection. There is nothing like *pace* to drive away unpleasant considerations ; but when two mile an hour is the best rate we can command, black Care is pretty sure to abandon his seat on the cantle of the saddle, and, springing nimbly to the front, grins at us in the face. I remember well how a fast-going youth—a friend of my boyhood, now, alas! gone to Jericho *viâ* Short-street, and with whom I have spent many a pleasant hour that might have been better employed—used to read with great energy whilst he was *dressing*. It was the only time, he said, that his conscience could get the better of him, and during which he had leisure to think of his sins and his debts. He smothered the accusing voice and its painful accessories by a course of severe study, and so got the anodyne and the information at once.

Mr. Sawyer's reflections were cheering enough till he began to get tired. He liked the idea of visiting the hospitable nobleman with whom he had lately parted, and pictured to himself the very pleasant visit he hoped to pay him, and

the accession of importance with which such an acquaintance would doubtless invest him amongst his Harborough friends. He only wished he had inquired his name; but then, he was evidently a personage whom everybody knew, and it was better not to betray his ignorance. Also, when the written invitation arrived—as unquestionably it would—with its armorial bearings, and signature in full, he would know all about it. Before he had tramped through the mud for a mile, he began to think he had rather "got into a good thing."

Ere long, it began to rain—first of all, an ominous drizzle, that seemed like continuing; then a decided pour, such as runs into the nape of a man's neck and the tops of his boots, and wets him through in about a quarter of an hour. It was not much fun, churning the fluid in his soles; so he climbed stiffly into the saddle, and was disagreeably aware that Hotspur, besides being thoroughly tired, was also undoubtedly *lame.*

By degrees, his spirits fell considerably. He began to think of the Honourable Crasher, with his off-hand manner and his nine hunters. He remembered a certain fable of the earthenware vessel that sailed down-stream amongst the iron pots. How was he to hold his own in the fast-

going set which he had entered? He had better, perhaps, have contented himself with the Old Country, and stayed quietly at home. The comforts of The Grange presented themselves in painful contrast to the muddy road along which he was plodding—even to the smoky bedroom and dingy parlour which would receive him at Harborough. Though the rain had moderated, he jogged along the dark highway, now squelching into puddles at the side, now cursing the stones lately laid down in the middle—in either case, to the equal discomfiture of poor Hotspur—and felt himself more unhappy and out of humour every yard he went.

Presently, the horse quickened his pace of his own accord; and the sound of hoofs behind him produced its usual inspiriting effect on the rider.

"Company, at all events," observed Mr. Sawyer, aloud. "Hold up, you brute!" he added, as Hotspur made an egregious "bite," that nearly landed him on his nose.

Ere long, the new arrivals ranged alongside of him. They were a lady and gentleman, on exceedingly tired horses. What a piece of luck! They were no other than the Reverend and Miss Dove!

"She knew me at once, though it's so dark,"

thought our friend, with considerable gratification, as the damsel, adapting her own pace to that of the jaded Hotspur without difficulty, accosted him by name.

"How lucky, too!" said she, in her joyous tones. "We shall keep each other company all the way to Harborough. Papa and I were just saying how lonely the road was, after dark; and our poor horses are so tired, they can hardly walk."

"Lucky indeed, for *me*," replied Mr. Sawyer, gallantly, adding with considerable *empressement*—for it was dark enough to give a shy man confidence—"Do you know, I was just thinking of you?"

The Reverend had dropped behind to light a cigar. Miss Dove seemed to have no objection to receive this statement; of the truth of which I have myself, however, strong doubts. She edged her horse a little nearer his companion, and answered laughingly.

"Indeed! A penny for your thoughts, then. I should like to know what you *could* have been thinking about *me* in the dark, after a day's hunting."

"I was thinking how well you rode," answered Mr. Sawyer, who, not much versed in the ways of womankind, saw he might have said

something more flattering, but, like a frightened bather, put one foot in, and then withdrew it. It was not *his line*, you see, as he said himself; and consequently he felt a little awkward at first with the ladies.

The latter, however, are in all cases strenuous advocates of the "sliding scale" rather than the "fixed duty." I think I have observed that they are usually as ready to bring a shy man "on" as they are to keep a forward one back. There is a certain temperature at which they consider you malleable; so they heat you up, or cool you down to it, with no small chemical skill. Sometimes, but rarely, they burn their own fingers in the process.

"I was wondering how *you* would get home," said the young lady very innocently after a pause. "Your poor horse looked so very tired; but, then, he carried you famously. Papa and I knew you by your cap—didn't we, papa?"

Papa, who had now come up, corroborated his daughter; but the Reverend was somewhat abstracted and unobservant. He was not quite satisfied with the way his horse had carried him. He doubted whether the animal had pace. He doubted whether he had blood. He doubted whether he had courage. In truth, he was

thinking just then whether he hadn't better sell him to Mr. Sawyer.

That worthy was recovering his lost ground, by expressing many tender hopes that Miss Dove was not very tired. "She had had such a long day; and it was so wet for a lady to be out; and how would she ever get home all that way into Leicestershire?"

"Oh, we have a carriage at Harborough," answered the fair object of all these anxieties; "and I don't mind being late half so much as papa does. I do so like being out at night. Do you know, though I am so fond of riding, I am rather *romantic*, Mr. Sawyer?"

"Oh, indeed! Yes, of course," rejoined our friend, seeing another opening, but not getting at it quite so readily as if it had been in a bullfinch. "It's very pleasant sometimes, particularly in the summer; and horses always go best at night. But, there's no moon now," he added, looking wistfully first at the heavens, and then, as far as the darkness would permit, in his companion's face.

"I'm certain you're a great quiz," answered Miss Dove to this harmless observation. "I told mamma I was quite afraid of you, the day you came to luncheon at the rectory. I dare say you think us all wild savages here, com-

pared with what people are in your own country. By the bye, your country place is somewhere near London, I think you said?"

Mr. Sawyer did not remember saying anything of the kind, but he looked insinuating, which he need not have done, as it was so dark, and replied,

"Forty minutes by rail. I can run up, and do my shopping, and back again, between luncheon and dinner. I'm only half a mile from a station."

Then he had a country place. So far so good. In discussing him with mamma, the latter had inclined to think *not*, but Miss Dove held strongly to her own opinion. She knew the country gentleman's cut, she said; and in this instance she was right.

"Do you farm much?" was her next inquiry, putting the unconscious Sawyer through his facings, as only a woman can.

"Not much," replied our friend. "I let most of my land; but I keep enough in my own hands to supply the house. One must have a few cows, you know, for milk and fresh-butter."

It was evidently all right. A man who had land to let and land to keep, and a place of his own, was clearly none of your penniless interlopers such as visit the grass at intervals, like

the locust, and eat it bare, and fly off and are seen no more. Here was a bee worth catching; with a hive, and honey, and flowers of its own —a good, honest humble-bee, with plenty of buzz, and no sting.

By this time the lights of Harborough were twinkling in the distance, and the Rev. Dove, whose horse had coughed more than once, thought it advisable to trot forward and get the carriage ready; whilst his daughter and Mr. Sawyer came on at a foot's-pace, the latter gallantly affirming that he would take the greatest possible care of his charge, and wishing, as soon as they were alone, either that somebody else would overtake them, and so break the *tête-à-tête*, or else that he could find something to say, else she must think him so confoundedly stupid. It was agreeable, too, when he got a little more used to it. The girl talked on in her gentle, pleasant voice, of the hounds, and the people, and the country. Her tones had caught the langour of slight fatigue, and were very soft and silvery to the ear. More than once he wished it was not too dark to see the long eyelashes resting on her cheek, those silky excrescences having made no slight impression on Mr. Sawyer. He felt quite sorry when the turnpike denoted their

approach to the confines of the town at which the ride must cease. He could not conceive now how he could have been so out of spirits not an hour ago.

"When shall I see you again?" he ventured to ask as their horses' hoofs clattered on the stony pavement, and he saw the lamps of the Reverend's carriage glowing like the eyes of some monster ready to carry off his Andromeda. As he spoke he even ventured to place his hand on her horse's neck; and this was a great stretch of gallantry for Mr. Sawyer.

"Oh, you'll be at the ball," answered Miss Dove, without withdrawing her steed from the range of her companion's caresses. "You'll be at the ball of course, even if we don't meet out hunting before that."

"Ball!" repeated our friend in amazement. "What ball do you mean?"

"Why, the Harborough Ball," answered the young lady. "Everybody will be there. Captain Struggles, Major Brush—even Mr. Crasher, though he won't do much in the way of dancing. Why, it is held at your hotel. The music will keep you awake all night, so you may as well go."

"I will, if you'll dance with me," rejoined Mr. Sawyer, with the air of a man who is "in for a penny, in for a pound."

And he felt queerer than he had ever done about Miss Mexico when she murmured a gentle affirmative. Nay, when he had put her carefully into papa's carriage, and tucked her up as assiduously as if she was going to the North Pole, he actually whispered, "You won't forget your promise?" while he shook hands, and wished her "Good bye." Nor did the scarce perceptible pressure with which that promise was ratified tend to restore our friend's equanimity in the least.

He was not a ball-going man: far from it. Also, I question whether it is not a breach of privilege that your rest at an hotel should be broken for a whole night by the thumping of feet, the squeaking of fiddles, the Scotch quadrilles, and the monotonous "tempête;" whilst your dinner and general comfort for two days previous to, and two days after the solemnity, is reduced to positive misery. Nevertheless, Mr. Sawyer caught himself repeating more than once during the evening—which, by the way, he spent in an atmosphere of smoke, with Struggles, Brush, Savage, and the Honourable Crasher—"Ball! ball!—was ever anything so lucky? Go!—of course I'll go! In fact, I promised: and perhaps she'll dance with me *twice!*"

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I NEVER can understand upon what principle the rate of a groom's wages is always inversely proportioned to the work he performs. For instance, Major Brush's excellent domestic—a bât-man, of lengthy proportions and military exterior—brushed his master's clothes, prepared his master's breakfast, took the first horse to covert, and rode the second on occasion, cleaning either or both, if necessary, when they came in, upon a stipend which would barely have kept Mr. Tiptop in Cavendish and blacking.

The latter worthy, with a whole troop of helpers under his command, never seemed to have a moment to spare for anything but the routine duties of his station. As for riding a second horse, or remaining out on a wet day, beyond his accustomed dinner-hour, his master would as soon have thought of bidding him dig potatoes! No: if Mr. Tiptop went out hunting at all, it was generally on a *third* horse in excel-

lent condition, that wanted a couple of hours' preparation for the day after to-morrow, when the rider in a long-backed coat, a shaved hat, and the best boots and breeches the art of man can compass, might be seen at intervals, during a run with the first fox, now opening a hand-gate, now creeping cautiously through a gap, and anon cantering, with a Newmarket seat, and his hands down, up some grassy slope, in front of soldiers, statesmen, hereditary legislators, and justices of the peace, as if not only the field, but the county, was his own.

Old Isaac, on the contrary, though subject to occasional "rustiness," and imbued with a strong aversion to what he called being "put upon," was ready and willing to turn his hand to anything, if he thought such versatility would *really* conduce to Mr. Sawyer's advantage. With the assistance of The Boy—who, indeed, since his arrival at Harborough, had been constantly inebriated—the old man looked after the three hunters, the hack, and his master, with considerable satisfaction. He had even spare time on his hands, now that he was removed from the responsibility of the pigs, the poultry, and the potatoes at The Grange.

It was in one of these moments of leisure that the bold idea of getting the better of Mr. Tiptop

entered the old groom's mind. I need not, therefore, specify that, under his calm demeanour, Isaac concealed a disposition of considerable enterprise and audacity.

Now the manner in which he proposed to take advantage of the acquaintance he had lately struck up with Mr. Tiptop was as follows: By dint of his own sagacity and diplomatic reticence, he resolved that he would prevail on that gentleman to persuade his master that the redoubtable bay horse Marathon should be transferred to his own stables; and, to explain Isaac's anxiety for this consummation, I must be permitted to describe the appearance and general capabilities of that peculiar animal.

Marathon, then, was a long bay horse about fifteen-two, with short legs, a round barrel, well ribbed up, and an enormous swish-tail, of which he made considerable use. He was one of those doubtfully-shaped animals which are condemned alike by the eye of the totally inexperienced and the consummate judges of horseflesh, but which are much coveted by that large class of purchasers with whom "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

And here I must remark how correct is usually our first impression of a horse; and how seldom ladies—who judge of these, as of all other articles

at a glance—are mistaken in their opinion of the noble animal, if indeed, they condescend to turn their attention to his "make and shape."

The worst point about Marathon was his head, which was coarse, and denoted a sulky temper; but he carried a beautiful coat; could stride away for a mile or so, on light ground, with his hind legs under him, in the form of a racehorse; and in short was never so graphically described as by Mr. Job Sloper, when he sold him for sixty guineas and a set of phaeton harness to his present owner: "If that there horse an't worth five hundred, why, he an't worth fifteen sovereigns—that's all."

And Mr. Sawyer had since confessed to himself, on more than one occasion, that Job Sloper was right.

Mr. Tiptop liked Isaac, because he thought him an original; and the swell groom, who was as epicurean in his tastes as if he had been a peer, took the pleasure of his friend's society over a can of egg-flip and a pipe of Cavendish daily, after evening stables; during which convivialities, the hardheadedness peculiar to the aborigines of the Old Country was of infinite service to the latter, who wormed out all the secrets of the Honourable Crasher's stable, without betraying his own.

"And there *is* some talk of a steeple-chase amongst these nobs, is there?" said Isaac, ordering at the same time a third can of "the flip," and knocking the ashes from his pipe with an exceedingly horny finger.

"*Talk* of it! indeed there is," answered Mr. Tiptop, whose face was beginning to redden with his potations. "And a precious exhibition it will be, too. Ride! There isn't one of 'em as don't believe he's down to every move in the game; and I'd take that boy of yours—though he *is* but a boy, and not the best of hands, neither—and teach him to outride every man of 'em in a fortnight! Such a mess as they made of it last year! Blessed if I wasn't quite ashamed of the Honourable, to see him rollin' about in a striped jacket, like a zebra in convulsions! What's the use of getting a horse fit, when the *man*'s blown in three fields? But I don't mind telling *you*, now," added he, confidentially, and fixing his eyes on the tallow candle that stood between them—"I don't mind telling *you;* for there's money to be made of it. He'll win it this year, if he'll only sit *still!*"

"Win it, will he?" rejoined Isaac. "Well, I shouldn't wonder, so as he comes in first. But it takes a smartish nag, Mr. Tiptop, to win a

steeple-chase. Have you *tried* yours to beat everything in the town?"

"Well, I think I've the length of most on 'em," answered Mr. Tiptop, smiling at the candle with a most reflective expression of countenance. "You've got a bay as might run up, if he was lucky. Why don't you make *your* master put him in?"

"He's as deep as a well, is *my* master," answered old Isaac. "Nobody never knows what *he*'s up to. Bless you! I can't help thinking as he must have brought the bay a purpose for this here race: but *I* don't know, no more than the dead; and I dursn't ask him, neither."

Mr. Tiptop reflected profoundly for several minutes, during which period Isaac's countenance would have been a study for an artist who wished to represent a face totally devoid of thought. Then he asked—

"Have *you* ever tried the bay?"

"*Never*," answered the senior, who piqued himself on his veracity. "Master brought him back from Stockbridge, last spring, pretty nigh done; and when I asked him what he'd been up to, he bid me mind my own business. The poor crittur! he'd had a benefit, *sure-lie!*"

This was undoubtedly true, Marathon having turned restive at a cross-road on the occasion in

question, and, after a quarter of an hour's fight, given in, completely exhausted.

"If he can beat our mare a mile, at even weights, he'll win it, as safe as safe!" observed Mr. Tiptop, now speaking very thick, and with a good deal of gravity.

"I dursn't give him *a mile*," answered Isaac, with an emphasis on the substantive which argued that he was open to persuasion for a shorter distance.

Mr. Tiptop regarded him attentively for several seconds, during which time he thought him first a flat, then the sharpest customer he had ever come across, and lastly an ignorant yokel and greenhorn once more.

"If *you'll* chance it," said he, "I'll chance *our* mare. We might try them early to-morrow morning."

Old Isaac pretended not to understand. Mr. Tiptop, with many flourishes, rose to explain.

"You go to exercise," said he, "a little before it's light, in the big close just outside the town. Put a fourteen-pound saddle on your nag; and don't say nothing to nobody. I'll be there in good time, just to give our mare a turn up the close. Nobody needn't be a ha'porth the wiser. Once we know the rights of it exactly, we can do what we like. You're game to the

back-bone, old cock, *I* know! *You* won't split!"

"But master's going to hunt the bay horse to-morrow," interposed Isaac, preserving his appearance of puzzled integrity with admirable composure.

"Never mind," answered Mr. Tiptop: "you come all the same." And, leering grimly at the tallow-candle, Mr. Tiptop made his exit, and betook himself heavily to bed.

In the meantime, the hunting gentlemen, at their hotel, had been talking over the probabilities of getting up a steeple-chase, and the chances of the different horses and riders, whose merits they discussed with considerable freedom, and no small amount of that playful *badinage* which moderns term "chaff."

Struggles, who rode over sixteen stone, was repeatedly entreated to enter, and cordially assured that he would carry all the money of the party; but Struggles, besides his enormous weight, was too good a sportsman to take pleasure in such a mongrel affair as a horse-race across a country.

"I'd sooner go to a badger-bait," said he, "or a cock-fight. I'd sooner hunt a cat in a kitchen, or a rat in a sewer. It's neither one thing nor the other; and I'll have nothing to do with it!"

an announcement which was received with derisive cheers by his companions, amongst which Struggles calmly lit a fresh cigar, and filled his tumbler once more with brandy-and-soda.

The committee, as they called themselves, had met, according to custom, for their nightly *weed.* They were indulging freely in the use of narcotics and stimulants, to the detriment of their digestions, and the destruction of their nerves. They lived by rule, these choice spirits, and restricting themselves, as they believed, with considerable self-denial, to about a bottle and-a-half of wine a-piece at dinner, considered that such abstinence entitled them to smoke any quantity of cigars, and drink any amount of pale brandy, choice Hollands, and such alcoholic fluids diluted with soda-water, out of glasses the size of stable-buckets.

Men who spend their evenings after this fashion, are apt to be surprised that they cannot cross a country with the coolness and judgment of their earlier years. They wonder why they are beat by Farmer Stiles, who rides a raw four-year-old, but who gets up with the sun, and has his beer with his dinner at one o'clock. They envy my Lord's iron nerves and fresh-coloured face, notwithstanding his grizzled hair, and do not consider that the peer has gone to bed with

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Marathon, then, was a long bay horse about fifteen-two, with short legs, a round barrel, well ribbed up, and an enormous swish-tail, of which he made considerable use. He was one of those doubtfully-shaped animals which are condemned alike by the eye of the totally inexperienced and the consummate judges of horseflesh, but which are much coveted by that large class of purchasers with whom "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

And here I must remark how correct is usually our first impression of a horse; and how seldom ladies—who judge of these, as of all other articles

at a glance—are mistaken in their opinion of the noble animal, if indeed, they condescend to turn their attention to his "make and shape."

The worst point about Marathon was his head, which was coarse, and denoted a sulky temper; but he carried a beautiful coat; could stride away for a mile or so, on light ground, with his hind legs under him, in the form of a racehorse; and in short was never so graphically described as by Mr. Job Sloper, when he sold him for sixty guineas and a set of phaeton harness to his present owner: "If that there horse an't worth five hundred, why, he an't worth fifteen sovereigns—that's all."

And Mr. Sawyer had since confessed to himself, on more than one occasion, that Job Sloper was right.

Mr. Tiptop liked Isaac, because he thought him an original; and the swell groom, who was as epicurean in his tastes as if he had been a peer, took the pleasure of his friend's society over a can of egg-flip and a pipe of Cavendish daily, after evening stables; during which convivialities, the hardheadedness peculiar to the aborigines of the Old Country was of infinite service to the latter, who wormed out all the secrets of the Honourable Crasher's stable, without betraying his own.

"And there *is* some talk of a steeple-chase amongst these nobs, is there?" said Isaac, ordering at the same time a third can of "the flip," and knocking the ashes from his pipe with an exceedingly horny finger.

"*Talk* of it! indeed there is," answered Mr. Tiptop, whose face was beginning to redden with his potations. "And a precious exhibition it will be, too. Ride! There isn't one of 'em as don't believe he's down to every move in the game; and I'd take that boy of yours—though he *is* but a boy, and not the best of hands, neither—and teach him to outride every man of 'em in a fortnight! Such a mess as they made of it last year! Blessed if I wasn't quite ashamed of the Honourable, to see him rollin' about in a striped jacket, like a zebra in convulsions! What's the use of getting a horse fit, when the *man*'s blown in three fields? But I don't mind telling *you*, now," added he, confidentially, and fixing his eyes on the tallow candle that stood between them—"I don't mind telling *you;* for there's money to be made of it. He'll win it this year, if he'll only sit *still!*"

"Win it, will he?" rejoined Isaac. "Well, I shouldn't wonder, so as he comes in first. But it takes a smartish nag, Mr. Tiptop, to win a

steeple-chase. Have you *tried* yours to beat everything in the town?"

"Well, I think I've the length of most on 'em," answered Mr. Tiptop, smiling at the candle with a most reflective expression of countenance. "You've got a bay as might run up, if he was lucky. Why don't you make *your* master put him in?"

"He's as deep as a well, is *my* master," answered old Isaac. "Nobody never knows what *he*'s up to. Bless you! I can't help thinking as he must have brought the bay a purpose for this here race: but *I* don't know, no more than the dead; and I dursn't ask him, neither."

Mr. Tiptop reflected profoundly for several minutes, during which period Isaac's countenance would have been a study for an artist who wished to represent a face totally devoid of thought. Then he asked—

"Have *you* ever tried the bay?"

"*Never*," answered the senior, who piqued himself on his veracity. "Master brought him back from Stockbridge, last spring, pretty nigh done; and when I asked him what he'd been up to, he bid me mind my own business. The poor crittur! he'd had a benefit, *sure-lie!*"

This was undoubtedly true, Marathon having turned restive at a cross-road on the occasion in

question, and, after a quarter of an hour's fight, given in, completely exhausted.

"If he can beat our mare a mile, at even weights, he'll win it, as safe as safe!" observed Mr. Tiptop, now speaking very thick, and with a good deal of gravity.

"I dursn't give him *a mile*," answered Isaac, with an emphasis on the substantive which argued that he was open to persuasion for a shorter distance.

Mr. Tiptop regarded him attentively for several seconds, during which time he thought him first a flat, then the sharpest customer he had ever come across, and lastly an ignorant yokel and greenhorn once more.

"If *you'll* chance it," said he, "I'll chance *our* mare. We might try them early to-morrow morning."

Old Isaac pretended not to understand. Mr. Tiptop, with many flourishes, rose to explain.

"You go to exercise," said he, "a little before it's light, in the big close just outside the town. Put a fourteen-pound saddle on your nag; and don't say nothing to nobody. I'll be there in good time, just to give our mare a turn up the close. Nobody needn't be a ha'porth the wiser. Once we know the rights of it exactly, we can do what we like. You're game to the

back-bone, old cock, *I* know! *You* won't split!"

"But master's going to hunt the bay horse to-morrow," interposed Isaac, preserving his appearance of puzzled integrity with admirable composure.

"Never mind," answered Mr. Tiptop: "you come all the same." And, leering grimly at the tallow-candle, Mr. Tiptop made his exit, and betook himself heavily to bed.

In the meantime, the hunting gentlemen, at their hotel, had been talking over the probabilities of getting up a steeple-chase, and the chances of the different horses and riders, whose merits they discussed with considerable freedom, and no small amount of that playful *badinage* which moderns term "chaff."

Struggles, who rode over sixteen stone, was repeatedly entreated to enter, and cordially assured that he would carry all the money of the party; but Struggles, besides his enormous weight, was too good a sportsman to take pleasure in such a mongrel affair as a horse-race across a country.

"I'd sooner go to a badger-bait," said he, "or a cock-fight. I'd sooner hunt a cat in a kitchen, or a rat in a sewer. It's neither one thing nor the other; and I'll have nothing to do with it!"

an announcement which was received with derisive cheers by his companions, amongst which Struggles calmly lit a fresh cigar, and filled his tumbler once more with brandy-and-soda.

The committee, as they called themselves, had met, according to custom, for their nightly *weed.* They were indulging freely in the use of narcotics and stimulants, to the detriment of their digestions, and the destruction of their nerves. They lived by rule, these choice spirits, and restricting themselves, as they believed, with considerable self-denial, to about a bottle and-a-half of wine a-piece at dinner, considered that such abstinence entitled them to smoke any quantity of cigars, and drink any amount of pale brandy, choice Hollands, and such alcoholic fluids diluted with soda-water, out of glasses the size of stable-buckets.

Men who spend their evenings after this fashion, are apt to be surprised that they cannot cross a country with the coolness and judgment of their earlier years. They wonder why they are beat by Farmer Stiles, who rides a raw four-year-old, but who gets up with the sun, and has his beer with his dinner at one o'clock. They envy my Lord's iron nerves and fresh-coloured face, notwithstanding his grizzled hair, and do not consider that the peer has gone to bed with

a clear head and a good conscience every night for the last forty years. Some days they get their courage up, and go as well as ever; but these inspiriting occasions become fewer and fewer, and at last they either give up their favourite amusement altogether, or, worse still, spend a large proportion of their time and income in a pursuit from which they have long ceased to derive either pleasure or profit.

The Honourable Crasher, though he smoked a great deal, had neither spirits nor inclination to drink much; consequently, notwithstanding his languor and apparent debility, he had preserved the integrity of his nervous system. Mr. Sawyer too, with a vigorous constitution, unimpaired by previous excesses, was not materially affected by these orgies, although his mouth was very dry in the mornings. All the rest, for the first ten minutes, rode more or less in a funk.

Nevertheless, volumes of smoke curled around the committee, and the thirst for brandy-and-soda seemed unquenched, unquenchable.

They had discussed the usual topics which enliven the dulness of a bachelor party. They had gone through the different subjects which arise in inevitable rotation. From the merits of horses and the shortcomings of riders, they had proceeded to the fascinations of the other sex,

and from that again had, of course, returned to the inexhaustible theme, the merits of horses, once more.

Major Brush, slightly excited, was the first to cross-question Mr. Sawyer about his stud. Hitherto they had treated our friend with the deference due to a stranger; but he was now to be considered one of themselves, and bantered or otherwise accordingly.

"You never ride that bay horse of yours, Sawyer," said the Major, in an off-hand free-and-easy sort of way. "I like him in the stable, better than anything you've got."

"Good horse," replied Mr. Sawyer, laconically. "Goes as fast as you can clap your hands."

Now considerable anxiety had already been excited amongst the grooms of Harborough concerning the powers of the said bay horse. Old Isaac, by an affectation of extreme secresy, had led one and all to believe there was what they termed "something up" about Marathon; and it was but that morning the Major's faithful bât-man had thought it right to give his master a hint that "Muster Sawyer had one as they were keepin' *dark*," so that the subject created immediate interest amongst the party. Mr. Savage put down the evening paper, behind which he had been observing his friends, with

a certain satirical amusement; Struggles paused in the act of raising his tumbler to his lips; and even the Honourable Crasher roused himself sufficiently to turn in his rocking-chair, and gaze with an expression of sleepy curiosity at the owner of the mysterious bay horse. Major Brush pursued his inquiries:

"Have you ever hunted him?" said he, "or do you keep him to look at?"

Dark and grim on Mr. Sawyer's mind rose many a vision of disappointment and discomfiture, and sporting casualties, such as come under the generic term "grief," originating in Marathon's incapacity; but he only replied:

"I've too few to keep any for show. I leave that to you swells with your large studs. All mine are forced to come out in their turn."

The careful ambiguity of our friend's answer put the whole company on the *qui vive*. There was evidently something about this nag that was to be *kept dark*. Even Struggles, the simplest and frankest of men, began to think Mr. Sawyer was what he called "a deep 'un." The astute Savage now stepped in for cross-examination.

"Shall you enter one for our steeple-chace, Sawyer?" said he, with an off-hand air. "Anything that can *really* gallop would be sure to

win; and as it is to be entirely amongst ourselves, and we shall all ride, it will be rather good fun."

"When is it?" asked Mr. Sawyer, with admirable simplicity, as if this very steeple-chace, and a certain ball which he had made up his mind to attend, were not the two topics by which he had of late been chiefly engrossed.

Everybody now spoke at once. "Time not fixed," said one. "Directly the weights are out," said another. "Whenever we can find a handicapper to give *universal* satisfaction," sneered a third; whilst the Honourable Crasher, turning once more in the rocking-chair, and losing a slipper in the effort, quietly remarked, he "would take ten to one even then that he named the winner."

"Take him, Sawyer!" exclaimed Major Brush. "Take him at once! and enter the bay horse. Owners to ride, of course. He's got nothing but Chance, now that Cantamount's lame," added the gallant officer, in a stage whisper, and with a degree of friendly *empressement* born of rosy wine.

The Honourable smiled feebly, but vouchsafed no reply. It was indeed too true, and as he had rather set his heart on winning this steeple-chace, the truth was unacceptable, as usual. Mr. Sawyer seemed to ponder deeply on what he had heard.

"I should lose so much hunting," said he, after a pause, during which he had smoked with considerable perseverance, and an aspect of profound reflection. "Why, a horse would not have the ghost of a chance, would he? unless he was put in training."

Doctors differ upon most subjects. "No training like regular hunting," said Struggles, who meant to have nothing to do with it. "Take him out often, and send him home early," advised Major Brush, who was generally of opinion that nothing more would be done after 1 P. M. "The half-bred ones seldom stand regular preparation," opined Mr. Savage, "I should keep him here under my own eye;" while the Honourable Crasher murmured something about "Newmarket being the only place to get a donkey fit."

Mr. Sawyer turned from one to the other, as if weighing carefully what each had said; then he flung his cigar end into the grate, finished his liquor at a gulp, and observing, "Well, I must think about it; in the meantime I'm going to hunt him to-morrow," wished his friends "good night," and departed for what he was pleased to term his "downy."

As Struggles and Brush, who occupied adjoining bed-rooms, shouldered each other up

the narrow passage that led to their apartments, the former declared, with a stupendous yawn, "He didn't quite know what to make of their new friend, but fancied, whether the bay was a *dark* one or not, his owner was well able to take care of himself." To which the Major, whose eyes seemed much dazzled by the candle in his hand, of which he was spilling the wax with considerable liberality over the passage-carpet, replied: "We shall find out all about him to-morrow, old boy, if we keep our eyes open—that's all: if we only keep our eyes open!" And for the better furtherance of this wide-awake scheme, the Major, whose eyes were already nearly closed, proceeded to turn in, after an attempt to undress, in which he only partially succeeded.

Mr. Sawyer, winding up his watch and depositing it carefully on his toilet-table, observed a face of considerable wisdom in his looking-glass, as he reflected on the interest which seemed to have been created about Marathon. He balanced the pros and cons; he enumerated not without disgust, the numerous failings of the horse; then he shook his head twice or thrice, gravely, as was his habit, when, to use his own expression, "he thought he saw his way."

CHAPTER XIV.

"BEFORE THE DAWN."

An unshaved face, blotched and parti-coloured from waning inebriety, up-turned and open-mouthed in all the imbecility of profound sleep; a recumbent form snoring loudly under a patch-work quilt, and supported by a rickety bedstead on an uncarpeted floor, in a room with a sloping roof, of which the only furniture seemed to be a box, originally intended for horse-clothing; a five-pound saddle, a pair of spurs, and a black bottle containing a tallow candle that had guttered itself out some two hours previously—all this does not sound like a cheerful and inspiriting scene about five o'clock on a winter's morning. Nevertheless, such did not fail to call a grim smile into Isaac's harsh countenance, as he contemplated it, on this, his first visit to Mr. Tiptop's apartment. Isaac had been revolving the swell stud-groom's proposal of the evening before, and had come to a decision in his own mind ere he went to sleep, the result of which

was his matutinal appearance in the chamber I have endeavoured to describe. He was not a man to waste much time in the contemplation even of a more agreeable sight than that which now met his eyes. He shook Mr. Tiptop roughly by the shoulder till that worthy sat up in bed, and blinked at his visitor's candle with a ludicrous expression of astonishment and dismay.

"What's up?" he exclaimed at last, as he began to be sensible of the old man's identity. "Blessed if I didn't think the stables was a-fire, and all our horses grilling, till I see it was you. Will you take any refreshment?" added Mr. Tiptop jocosely, pointing to an earthenware ewer containing cold water—and not much of that; "or is there anything I can do for you besides telling you what o'clock it is?" he added, yawning, and betraying strong symptoms of a desire to go to sleep again.

Old Isaac laid his finger to his nose.

"Get up," said he in a cautious whisper. "It *is* just to know *what's o'clock* as I've come here. You lay your hand on a fourteen-pound saddle, and there need be no mistake about the weights. My nag's ready, and turned round. You go and get yourn. There's a bit o' moon left: not quite burned down yet. We can get it over

and done with, and the horses back in the stable afore the others is up."

Mr. Tiptop was a man of considerable energy when anything like a robbery was on the cards: he was, however, hardly prepared for such a display of alacrity on the part of his companion. He put one skinny leg out of bed, and then paused, staring vaguely at his visitor.

"Come, look alive!" said old Isaac, fishing a pair of breeches from the floor; "there ain't a minute to lose. Where's the key o' *your* stable?"

The weaker nature obeyed instinctively; Tiptop put on his breeches, and produced the key.

"Not a word to living mortal!" urged the old man impressively. "It's as much as my place is worth. I've left The Boy safe locked up. You go and get *your* horse, and meet me in the close. There's just light enough to gallop 'em. Look alive, man! Whatever should I do if master was to get wind of this here?"

Isaac seemed unusually perturbed as he preceded Mr. Tiptop down the creaking stairs, and wended his way to his own stable, leaving the latter—still rather confused—to saddle and bring out the redoubtable Chance.

The Honourable Crasher's groom felt for the

first time in his life somewhat puzzled, and taken aback. He had not calculated on such promptitude and decision from a "yokel." Also, his intellects had hardly recovered the potency of the flip, a beverage of which it requires several hours' sleep to obviate the effects. Altogether he was sensible of less than his usual self-confidence. In his hurry, too, and by the imperfect light of a stable-lantern, he put the wrong saddle on Chance, who, by the way, was no a very pleasant animal to caparison, save by her own accustomed attendant—a grey-haired, withered old helper, then probably dreaming of the better days most of these ancient stablemen have seen. The snaffle, too, that he wanted was not in its accustomed place. Altogether, it took him some considerable time before he could lead the horse out into the wan light of a morning moon. This interval, however, had enabled him to recover the good opinion he generally entertained of Mr. Tiptop. As he got upon Chance's back, and felt the animal step lightly and jauntily under him, the conviction came strong upon his mind that in some way or other he was sure to get the better of the yokel.

As the conscience-stricken Marmion riding his red-roan by night into the enchanted ground

was aware of a phantom cavalier looming dimly in the distance in guise of his deadliest enemy, so Mr. Tiptop, opening the gate of the close, which he had appointed for a trysting-place, distinguished the outline of the man and horse, with whom he was about to try the speed of his thorough-bred. As he neared his antagonist he observed that the animal he bestrode was sheeted and hooded, and otherwise so swaddled up in clothing, that there was nothing visible of it, save its legs; and in the uncertain twilight the general effect of the pair much resembled that of those hobby-horses which so delighted our ancestors in their Christmas revels.

"Look alive!" exclaimed Mr. Tiptop, somewhat angrily, as a black cloud swept across the moon, and a raw morning breeze dashed a score of sharp rain-drops into his feverish face. "It will be light in half-an-hour, though it's as dark as pitch now. Aint you going to strip him?"

"Strip him!" repeated Isaac, keeping off at a respectful distance the while. "Not I; he always runs kindest in his clothes. Don't ye come anigh!" he added, as Mr. Tiptop ranged alongside. "He's wery handy with his heels when he's at exercise. Are you ready?"

Now the close, as such open spaces are termed only in the midland counties, was a field

of sound old grass, comprising little less than a hundred acres, and was much affected as an exercising ground by the grooms of such sportsmen as had chosen Market Harborough for their head-quarters. This was sufficiently attested by the trodden state of its hedges, betraying the hoof-marks of many a good nag, whose speed had been tried here far oftener than was dreamt of by his master. Do you think we know the merits of our steeds one-half as well as do their own immediate attendants? Why are the hacks always in such good condition, and constantly falling lame so unaccountably? Is it that on their homeward way they are matched continually against each other, and against Father Time, whereby many pots of beer and goes of brandy are lost and won on the result? To a man who *really* cares for his horses, a groom he can depend upon is worth his weight in gold.

Both Isaac and Mr. Tiptop knew perfectly well that a straight run-in, the long way of the furrows, up to a certain white gate which they would pass on their right hand, was as near half a mile as possible. The latter, keeping out of reach of his opponent's heels, proposed a longer distance; but Isaac, declaring it was simply a question of speed, as they both knew

their horses' performances in the hunting-field, overruled his friend on this point.

"When you're ready," said the old sinner, who could hardly see his listener in the increasing darkness, "we'll start, and run it from end to end. Mind, Mr. Tiptop, I trust to your h'onour!"

"In course!" replied Mr. Tiptop, who was considering whether he could make a better thing of it by acting, as he himself would have said, entirely on "the square," or otherwise.

Accordingly they took up their positions some ten yards apart, but strictly on the same level, and went off with a rush, amicably and honourably, when they were both ready.

It would be doing injustice to Mr. Tiptop to say that, when he really chose, he was not a consummate horseman, either across a country or over the flat. On the present occasion he was resolved to do all he knew, and he sat down upon Chance, and got at her in the most masterly manner. The mare, however, like many that have been in training, was a lurching, shifty goer, taking several strides before she got fairly into her speed. Mr. Tiptop, notwithstanding his proficiency, saw the dark figure of his opponent a dozen lengths a-head of him, and could not over-haul him, do what he would. His

finish, no doubt, was inimitable, but it failed to land him first past the goal. Old Isaac, there was no disputing it, won cleverly by a couple of lengths.

Mr. Tiptop couldn't make it out. "They've got a flyer," said he to himself; "and they *know it!*"

He would fain have talked it over with Isaac then and there; but the veteran, simply remarking that "he was quite satisfied, and it would be daylight in ten minutes," passed through the white gate already mentioned, and trotted back to the town at a pace which Mr. Tiptop's regard for Chance's legs forbade him to imitate.

Both horses were safe home in their stables before the helpers were up.

CHAPTER XV.

TAKING A HINT.

No man alive subscribed more heartily than did the Honourable Crasher to Mr. Sheridan's aphorism, that "If the early bird catches the worm, what a fool must the worm be to get up earlier than the bird!" It was always a matter of great difficulty to get the Honourable out of bed, and not to be managed without considerable diplomacy. The stud-groom and valet laid their heads together for this purpose with laudable ingenuity, the former entertaining a professional regard for the hack's legs, the latter being much averse to the idea of a hurried toilet. He liked to turn the Honourable out as a gentleman should be dressed, resplendent in scarlet, and with faultless boots and breeches. In his own opinion, proper justice could not be done to the garments he had prepared, under an hour-and-a-quarter; and when the place of meeting was a dozen miles off, and the church clock chiming half-past nine found his master

still in bed, the valet might be seen pervading the passages with tears in his eyes. The *ruse* he found most efficacious was to tap at the door soon after eight, and say it was near ten. The Honourable's watch was pretty sure to have been left down-stairs, or, if in his bed-room, to have stopped, unwound, and often as the trick had succeeded, Crasher never seemed yet to have found it out. Even if he rose in time, however, he was a sad dawdle. There were letters to be read, and sometimes answered. He would breakfast in a gorgeous dressing-gown, and smoke a cigar over a French novel afterwards, never dreaming of getting into his hunting things till he ought to have been more than half way to covert. Sometimes, and this was the sorest grievance of all, he would take a fancy not to hunt, and then changing his mind at the last moment, order round one of the unfortunate hacks, and go off like a flash of lightning.

On the morning to which I have already alluded, Mr. Tiptop cleaned, breakfasted, and considerably freshened up, having completely recovered the effects of his early gallop, seen everything set straight about the stable, and despatched two of his master's horses to Shearsby Inn, was vainly waiting for an audi-

ence at the Honourable's bed-room door about 10 A.M.

The valet, a staid elderly man, who, as Mr. Tiptop would have said, made a point of "standing in" with all the upper servants, treated the stud-groom with considerable deference. They had exhausted their usual topic of the weather, the probability of sport, and their master's propensities for repose, and were now beguiling the time, by listening at his chamber door alternately, till the welcome sound of much splashing and hard breathing announced that the Honourable had tumbled out of bed into his tub.

After a while the valet gave a lów tap at the door, accompanied by a cough.

"Who's there?" said the inmate of the chamber, sedulously drying his elegant proportions before an enormous fire.

"Beg your pardon, sir," answered the well-drilled servant. "Mr. Tiptop, sir, wishes to speak to you, sir."

"Tell him to go to the devil," rejoined the Honourable, struggling leisurely into a clean shirt.

There was no occasion for the polite valet to repeat this message, inasmuch as Mr. Tiptop was there to hear it for himself. The servants

looked at each other, and laughed in their sleeve.

Presently, the valet, who knew to a second how long each stage of the toilet ought to last, knocked again.

"What is it?" murmured the Honourable very indistinctly, for the sufficient reason that he was sedulously brushing his teeth.

"Mr. Tiptop, sir, wishes to know if he can see you before you go down to breakfast?"

The stud-groom was well aware that no confidential communication could take place during that meal, disturbed as it usually was by the arrival of other late starters dropping in, to hurry their friend.

"Come in," gurgled the Honourable: and his stud-groom made his appearance, smoothing his shiny head as all grooms do.

"What's the matter, Tiptop?" inquired his master, poising the tooth-brush between finger and thumb. "Are all the horses lame?"

"Not so bad as that, sir," answered Tiptop, respectfully, revolving in his mind how he should begin what he had to say. For all his languor, there was something about Crasher that made people very loath to take a liberty. "I only

wanted to tell you, sir, of a horse I've seen as you ought to buy. I thought I'd make bold to tell you before any of the other gentlemen got word of him. He's a flyer, sir—that's what he is!"

Now, in all matters relating to the stable, Mr. Tiptop ruled paramount, the Honourable's system being to make his groom look out for horses, and if he liked their appearance himself, to buy them at once. With regard to riding, I have already said, he could make them all go, if they had any pretensions to hunters about them.

"Whose is he?" was the next question asked; for the Honourable was now finishing his toilet in such a hurry as could have made you suppose he never was late in his life.

"Mr. Sawyer's, sir," answered Tiptop. "It's the bay. He'll be on him to-day at Shearsby Inn."

"Very well," answered the Honourable, buttoning on a watch-chain, with half-a-dozen lockets attached, as he emerged from his room. "Tell Smiles to get breakfast *directly*, and send the hack round in ten minutes!"

Mr. Tiptop looked after him admiringly, as he clanked down-stairs. "He means *business*

this morning," thought the groom, "and I'll lay a new hat he buys the bay horse!"

Now if Mr. Tiptop had felt he had the best of the morning trial, it had been his intention to pull his horse back, and gammon his friend Isaac that he was beat, with the laudable determination to get the better of that worthy, as well as of the general public, by making good use of his knowledge previous to the race. When, however, he found that her antagonist had the heels of Chance, whom he had already tried with the other grooms to be quite the best in the town, he altered his tactics altogether. Obviously they ought to have both the flyers in the same stable; and it would be wiser to stand in with Isaac, and make the old groom a sharer in the profits, as he was already in the information which their early rising had enabled them to obtain. Mr. Tiptop forgot that it is as dark before dawn as it is after nightfall. He might, perhaps, have been further enlightened, had he, instead of waiting at his master's door till the Honourable's teeth had been polished to the required degree of whiteness, been able to assist at an interview which took place at the same hour between Isaac and his master, in a room where the latter had just finished breakfast.

The old groom made no apology for enter-

ing ; as was his custom, he plunged at once *in medias res.*

"I've sent *two* out for you to-day," said he, marching up to Mr. Sawyer's chair, and confronting him with a grin, such as might be cut out of mahogany.

"And left *one* in the stable ! you old idiot !" exclaimed the indignant Mr. Sawyer. "What the deuce have you done that for ?"

"You'll want a second horse to-day," answered the groom. "You'll have a bid for Marathon before you've been on him half-an-hour. Leastways, if you've the discretion not to go a showing of him up."

"What do you mean ?" asked Mr. Sawyer, with a dawning of intelligence overspreading his countenance, for he knew his servant's diplomatic talents of old.

"Only that they're all of 'em wanting a nag to win this here donkey-race, as I call it ; for none but a donkey would be concerned in such a tom-foolery ; and Mr. Crasher, he's satisfied by this time that Marathon's the one as just *can.* You sit still upon him to-day, and keep jogging of him about, to *qualify* like, till the hounds find, and then open your mouth, and take what they offer you."

Mr. Sawyer had implicit confidence in his old

servant; still he could not help wishing to be further enlightened.

"You must have told some precious yarns," said he, "to make people believe Marathon could *run up* with a man in mud-boots!"

"I never said a word!" answered Isaac; "people may believe their own eyes. Mr. Tiptop and I, we tried 'un this very morning again Chance; and though she's the best in the town, we beat her by more than a length."

"Marathon beat that mare!" exclaimed Mr. Sawyer, now completely taken aback. "What *do* you mean?"

Old Isaac's features were distorted once more into the mahogany grin.

"Well, if Marathon didn't, Jack did," said he, quietly. "You couldn't tell one from the other in their clothing when it's dark, and the Dandy would win the Derby if it wasn't over half-a-mile."

It was too true: though the smart little nag never could stay a mile at a racing pace in his best days, he was as quick on his legs as a rabbit, and nothing could touch him, for five furlongs. Swaddled up in his clothes under the dubious twilight of a winter's morning, Mr. Tiptop never suspected him, and went home

with the conviction that Marathon, and none other, was the horse that had beaten his favourite.

Mr. Sawyer laughed to himself as he rode Jack very gingerly on to Shearsby Inn.

CHAPTER XVI.

RIDING TO SELL.

If Mr. Sawyer had kept a hunting journal (which he didn't) he would have noted down the meet at Shearsby Inn, as one of those gorgeous spectacles, which make an ineffaceable impression on the eye of the unpractised beholder. There appeared to be more hounds, more horses, more servants, more carriages, and altogether a larger staff and retinue attached to the establishment, than he had ever hitherto seen paraded for the purpose of killing a fox. Nevertheless, with all this show, there was no mistake about the workman-like tendency of the turn-out. If the pack was numerous, it was also exceedingly level and in faultless condition; the huntsman and whips looked as if they must have been born and bred for the especial offices they respectively filled, and the second-horse men, notwithstanding their numbers, appeared to be all cut from the same pattern. As for the hunters, Mr. Sawyer would

have wished no better luck than to ride the worst of them at a hundred-and-fifty guineas. One magnificent bay with a side-saddle, destined, no doubt, to carry a beautiful and precious burden, quite put him out of conceit with Hotspur and the grey. As for Marathon! why he would never have got on him, in such company, had not the pleasing reflection crossed his mind, that perhaps to-day he should get rid of the brute altogether.

He had ridden The Dandy very leisurely to covert, in consideration of the animal's services before dawn, and had sent on the grey with an occasional helper from the inn, under the superintendence of The Boy, who was perched on Marathon; old Isaac, who wanted to buy some hay cheap, having given himself leave of absence for the day. The helper, with many injunctions to go steadily, was entrusted with the homeward-bound hack; and The Boy shifted to the second horse, whilst Mr. Sawyer himself bestrode the redoubtable bay. All these arrangements, with the accompanying pulling up of curb-chains and letting down of stirrup-leathers, took some little time. Before our friend was fairly mounted and under way, the hounds had gone on to draw the well-known

gorse called John Ball, and he found himself nearly the last of the lengthening cavalcade. Under existing circumstances, this was no great disadvantage, and the quieter he kept the bay, he thought, the better was his chance of selling him; yet he could not help wishing old Isaac had left the whole business alone. He might then have been forward with the hounds, looking out for a start on whichever horse he liked best, uninfluenced—as a man always should be, really to enjoy fox-hunting—by the sordid considerations of £ s. d.

Marathon was very fresh, and set his back up, squeaking in a most undignified manner, and swishing his heavy tail till it reached his rider's hat.

A horse galloping up from behind set him plunging with a violence that was scarcely pleasant, even to so practised a rider as our friend. He returned the greeting of the new comer—no less a personage than the Honourable Crasher, late as usual, and cantering to the front on Boadicea by Bellerophon, out of Blue-light—with the preoccupied air of a man who expects every moment to be on his back.

The Honourable, slightly amused, pulled up alongside. "Halloa, Sawyer," said he, "you'll

be hard to beat to-day: the steeple-chaser seems uncommon full of running."

"It's only his play," answered Mr. Sawyer, modestly; indulging Marathon, who was preparing for another kick, with a vicious jerk of the curb: "I can't get my old groom to give him work enough, and he's sent me a second horse out to-day!"

This was meant to imply that the kicker was too valuable an animal for a mere hunter, and the Honourable interpreted it accordingly. As he rode alongside, he scanned the bay's points with the critical eye of a purchaser. A horse never looks so well as when he is trotting beside you on a strip of grass, excited by the presence of hounds. If backed by a good horseman, the veriest brute, under these circumstances, makes the most of his own appearance. Marathon going within himself, playing lightly with his bit, and bringing his hind leg under his girths at every step, was a very different horse from the same Marathon extended, and labouring in a sticky ploughed field. I have already said he possessed many qualities sufficiently taking to the eye. As the Honourable examined him from his muzzle to his hocks, he could not but acknowledge that the horse looked uncommonly like a galloper. "If he can only jump," thought

Crasher, "and get pretty quick over his fences, he ought to be a *rattler*. I suppose I shall have to buy him."

Meantime Mr. Sawyer, who, as he remarked of himself, "was not such a fool as he looked," but on the contrary resembled those "still waters" which the German proverb says "run so deep," conversed affably with his friend on a number of topics totally unconnected with horse-flesh or the pleasures of the hunting-field. For once in his life, he did not want to get a start, that's the truth; and as his companion was one of those indolent, easy-going people whose fancy can be led astray without difficulty in any given direction, they were soon deep in a variety of subjects, originating no doubt with Mr. Sawyer, but to which, I am bound to say, he had never devoted much of his time or attention. They touched upon the last misadventure brought under the notice of Sir Cresswell Cresswell—discussed the agricultural prospects of the season, and on this theme it would be difficult to say which was most incapable of giving an opinion—argued on the importance of a movement for taking the duty off cigars, and lastly got involved in the interminable question of what use the Volunteers would be, in the event of an invasion, and whether or not they would be

killed to a man, when their conversation was cut short by an obvious bustle and confusion about a mile ahead of them, denoting that a fox had not only been found, but gone away.

"Done to a turn!" exclaimed the Honourable, interrupting his own explanation of how he should handle skirmishers if he was a general officer, which, by the way, it was fortunate for the skirmishers he was *not*. What a bore! We shan't catch them in a week!" he added, turning Boadicea's head at the fence, and starting her at score through a deep ploughed field. In a few strides he had forgotten skirmishers, and Marathon, and Mr. Sawyer, and everything in the world except that he had lost his start.

The latter, watching the line "fine by degrees and beautifully less" on the horizon, rather congratulated himself, that his chance was completely out, and that there was now no temptation for him either to exert his own energies, or draw upon the failing powers of Marathon in the pursuit of that which he felt could scarcely be called *pleasure*. He jogged along the lane accordingly, contented enough, thinking what fun he would have on the grey, in the afternoon, with a second fox!

But few of us can have hunted much without remarking a peculiarity connected with the

chase, that occasions constant irritation and annoyance to its votaries. Have you never observed, that if you lose your chance of getting away with hounds, whether from procrastination, inattention, or the laudable objection entertained by a rational man to ride at a large fence, do what you will, you only succeed in increasing the distance between yourself and the object you wish to reach? In vain you "nick," and "skirt," and ride to points that you think likely to be affected by a fox running for his life; in vain you "harden your heart," and sail away boldly over the line of gaps already established by your predecessors; you are only tiring your horse, and risking your neck in a wild-goose chase. You diverge to a distant holloa, and find it raised by a boy scaring crows. You succeed by extraordinary exertions in reaching the group of scarlet coats and bobbing hats you have been following so long, and learn that they have been "thrown out" like yourself, and the farther you go, the farther you are left behind; till you hate yourself, as much as your horse hates you, for not having judiciously joined the band of second-horse riders, and so jogged contentedly along in ease and safety, sure to come up with the first flight at last.

On the other hand, we will suppose that you have tired your best hunter early in the day, or he has fallen lame on that weak point where everybody said he *would* be lame when you bought him, or you have a hundred-and-fifty other reasons for wishing to sneak quietly home, out of the observation of your friends. Those plaguy hounds seem to follow you as if you were the Wild Huntsman himself, and you begin to appreciate the severity of the punishment inflicted on that wicked German Baron. They draw coverts that lie on your homeward way. They find, and hunt with provoking persistency alongside the very lane up which you would fain jog in solitude, crossing it more than once under your nose. There is sure to be a fair holding scent, not good enough to enable them to run clear out of your neighbourhood and have done with it, yet sufficient to afford plenty of enjoyment to such as are with them; these have, nevertheless, leisure to observe your movements, and to wonder why you are not amongst them. They are all your own particular friends, and you know you will be called upon, next hunting morning, to answer that difficult question—"What became of *you*, after we left you in the road at So-and-so?" Diana seems to delight in the rule of contrary. Like

the rest of her sex, she takes you up and persecutes you, when you don't want her; and when you are most ardent and zealous in her pursuit, she rebuffs you and puts you down.

Nothing could be farther from Mr. Sawyer's wishes than to find himself, on the present occasion, in a conspicuous position with the Quorn hounds. Had he wanted to be singled out in front of all that talent and beauty, Marathon was certainly the last animal he would have chosen on which to make an appearance in such choice company; nevertheless, the force of circumstances is beyond the control even of men like Mr. Sawyer, and however averse he might be to "achieve greatness," he found, most unwillingly, "greatness thrust upon him." For a while he had lost sight of everybody, and was in the act of pulling out his cigar-case to enjoy one of his *Laranagas* in solitude and repose, purposing to hang on the line, keeping a little down wind, and as soon as he should spy the second-horse, mount the grey, and send Marathon straight home. Crasher, he thought, would buy the horse without asking any more questions.

Scarcely, however, had he got his weed fairly *under weigh*, than the music of a pack of hounds broke suddenly on his ear from behind a high

impervious bullfinch that sheltered one side of the grass-lane along which he was proceeding so leisurely. "Confound the brutes!" said Sawyer to himself, "here they are again!" As he opened the gate through which the track led into a sixty-acre pasture, the whole pack swept under his horse's nose, running with sufficient energy to denote what sportsmen call a good holding scent; they carried a capital head, and were forcing their fox at a pace which kept him going, but was not good enough to come up with him.

It was just the sort of gallop that enables people who ride to hounds to look about them, and enjoy not only the sport, but the accompanying humours of the scene.

In these days, a *real* quick thing is such an affair of hurry, that the lucky few who are in it cannot spare a moment's attention from anything but their horses' ears.

Had he been riding a donkey, it was not in Mr. Sawyer's nature to abstain from turning the animal's head towards the hounds under such temptation; moreover, he distinguished amongst the first flight, his Harborough companions, including the pale face of the Honourable Crasher, who by "bucketing" Boadicea most unmercifully, had got there somehow, and

appeared quite satisfied with his situation. What could our friend do, but cut in, and go to work at once ?

Marathon, excited by the turmoil, was fain to set his back up once more. He found, however, that the kicking was now all the other way. Taking him in a grasp that would have lifted a ton, Mr. Sawyer drove his spurs into the half-bred brute, and set him going close to the hounds at the best place he could command. For a short distance, and when held well together, Marathon could stride away in a very imposing form. The sensation of having a lead is, in itself, provocative of emulation ; behind our friend were four or five intimate companions, who were not likely to let him hear the last of any instance of "shirking" that should come under their notice. Close on their track were the flower of Leicestershire ; and these again were succeeded, so to speak, by a whole army of camp-followers, "maddening in the rear." Had the Styx been in front of him, he must have charged it "in or over."

Instead of the waters of Acheron, however, there was nothing more formidable in his line than a straggling, over-grown bullfinch at the far end of the field ; just such a fence, indeed, as Marathon was in the habit of declining, but

yet which he hoped the turmoil behind, the general excitement, and the persuasive powers of his own spurs, would enable him to induce his horse to face. He had plenty of time to scan it as he approached. Half a mile or so of ridge and furrow, even at a hunter's best pace, gives leisure for consideration. Ere the hounds had strung through it in single file, he was aware of a wide ditch *to* him; on the farther side was obviously a grass field, *and* an uncertainty!

Marking with his eye the weakest place, through which, nevertheless, he could not see daylight, Mr. Sawyer crammed his hat on his head, and set his horse resolutely at the fence; Marathon, according to custom, when he expected anything out of the common, *shutting up* every stride he went. Had it not been rather down-hill, even his owner's consummate horsemanship would have failed to bring him close to it. The fall of the ground, however, and the pace he was going, forbade the bay to stop—*Crash!* he plunged into the very middle of the fence—broke through it from sheer velocity, to jerk both knees against a strong oak-rail beyond—blundered on to his nose over *that*—slid half a dozen yards on his head—nearly recovered himself—stumbled once more,

and finally got up again, with his curb-rein turned over his ears; the rider's feet out of both stirrups, hat off, a contusion on his left eye-brow, and the horse's nostrils full of mud, but *no fall!*

"By the powers, that's a *rum one!*" said Mr. Sawyer, as he cantered slowly up the opposite slope, repairing damages the while, and turned round to see the first flight charge the obstacle, which had so nearly disposed of his own chance.

Lusty as eagles, ravenous as wolves, jealous as girls, down came the four *gluttons* at the fence, each man having chosen his own place, and scorning to deviate one hair's breadth from his line. None, however, had made so judicious a selection as Mr. Sawyer. The rail, which had so nearly discomfited the latter, would neither bend nor break, but he had the luck of getting it where it was lowest and nearest to the fence; everywhere else it was not only high, but stood out a horse's length into the field, just the place which must catch the cleverest hunter in the world, if ridden to do it all in his stride.

The scene that met Mr. Sawyer's eyes was amusing, though alarming. Four *imperial crowners* at one and the same instant—four loose horses galloping wildly away—four red-

coats rising simultaneously from mother earth —eight top-booted legs shuffling in ludicrous haste after the departing steeds. Had our friend been Briareus himself, he could not have caught *all* their horses. He was a man, however, who seldom lost an opportunity, and was not likely to miss such a chance as the present. Selecting Boadicea, he galloped after her, and succeeded in pinning her against a pound: notwithstanding that the mare lashed out at him more than once, he brought her back in triumph to her panting owner.

Meanwhile, the four dismounted sportsmen condoled breathlessly with each other, as they laboured up the grassy slope.

"I'm but a poor hand at *this* game," observed Struggles, who did not fancy carrying his own weight across country.

"I wish I'd gone faster at it," said Savage, who had been grinding his teeth and hardening his heart the whole way up the field.

"My chesnut mare would have jumped it!" exclaimed Major Brush, inwardly registering a vow to abstain from "oxers" for the future; whilst the Honourable, though he held his tongue, was thinking what a capital horse that was of Sawyer's, and dismally reflecting that if Boadicea hadn't kicked at him when he was

down, he never would have been such a tailor as to let her go.

"Catch hold!" said Mr. Sawyer, throwing the mare's reins to her owner, whose gratitude he thereby earned for the rest of his life. "There's no hurry," he added, as the Honourable, in a coat plastered with mud and a hat stove in, dived wildly at his stirrup; "they've over-run it a mile back, and checked in the next field."

The latter part of the sentence was true enough. His quick eye had shown him the pack at fault, as he secured Boadicea in the corner where the pound stood; the former was a bit of what theatrical people call "gag." It was as much as to say, "Whilst you fellows are hustling, and spurting, and tumbling about, I am so well mounted that I can observe matters as coolly as if I was hunting in a balloon."

It was not without its effect on his listener. As they rode through the hand-gate together into the enclosure where the hounds were at fault, the Honourable Crasher no longer scanned Marathon with the eye of a purchaser. He looked on the horse now as his own property. He was determined to have him.

By some mysterious law of nature, whenever one individual succeeds either in what is termed

pounding a field, or in getting such a start of them that nobody shall have a chance of catching him whilst the pace holds—and this, be it observed, is no every-day occurrence in countries where the best riders in England congregate for the express purpose of riding as well as they can—it invariably happens that the immediate failure of scent, or some such untoward contingency, robs the lucky one of his anticipated triumph. On the present occasion, much to Mr. Sawyer's delight, they never hit off their fox again. By degrees, the tail of the field straggled up, having found their way by every available gate and gap; then came the second-horses, carefully ridden, cool, and comparatively clean, not having turned a hair; lastly, arrived a man in a gig, by a convenient bridle-road, hotter than any one present, wiping his face on a coloured handkerchief, which he afterwards put in the crown of his hat.

Whilst sandwiches were being munched, and silver horns drained of their contents, ginger-cordial, orange-brandy V. O. P.,* and other

* Very Old Pale—a tempting label attached to certain black bottles containing the best French brandy; an excellent liquor, doubtless, and wholesome, *provided* you don't drink too much of it. Opinions vary, however, as to what is *too much*. The modest quencher of 9 P.M. growing to a superfluous stimulant at the same hour the following morning.

enticing fluids, Mr. Sawyer was giving The Boy stringent orders about taking Marathon home. He could not feel thoroughly comfortable till that imposter was fairly out of sight, and he should find himself established on the very unassuming little grey.

When he had made up his mind, the Honourable Crasher was a man of few words. Refreshed by a mouthful of sherry, not unacceptable after a rattling fall, and comfortably perched on the back of Confidence, a delightful animal that a child could ride, and perhaps the best and safest hunter in his stable, he ranged alongside of our friend, and plunged at once *in medias res.*

"So you want to sell the bay horse you have just sent home?" said he, with none of the hesitation and beating about the bush to which Mr. Sawyer had hitherto been accustomed in his horse-dealing operations. "If you do, and will name the price you ask for him, I should like to buy him."

The owner could not resist the impulse of enhancing the value of his horse, by affecting unwillingness to sell him, and, in so doing, nearly lost the chance of disposing of him, altogether.

"I don't think I ought to part with him," said

he, reflectively; "it strikes me he's about the best in my stable."

Crasher fell back apparently satisfied. It was evident he did not attach so much importance to the act of "exchange or barter" as did our friend. Mr. Sawyer picked himself up without loss of time. "I shouldn't like to sell him to *everybody*," said he, affectionately, "but if you fancy him very much, I wouldn't mind letting you have him," he added, after a pause, and in the tone of a man who makes a painful sacrifice in the cause of friendship.

"I'll give you two hundred and fifty for him," drawled out the Honourable, with apparently about as much interest as he would have felt in paying three-and-sixpence for a pair of gloves.

"Guineas!" stipulated Mr. Sawyer; "Guineas," was the answer, and in this simple manner the deal was concluded.

My readers will agree with Isaac and his master, in thinking that Marathon was not the only one of the party who was pretty well sold. The old groom laughed in his sleeve a week afterwards, when he heard that on giving him "a spin" with Chance, just to keep his pipes clear, the mare went away from him as if he was standing still.

Mr. Tiptop couldn't make it out at all.

CHAPTER XVII.

"TEMPTED TO BUY."

And now for the well-pleased John Standish Sawyer, came in what may be called the "sweet of the day." His horse disposed of, two hundred and sixty-two pounds ten shillings in his pocket (for the Honourable Crasher's word was as good as a bank-bill), and the wiry little grey under him, an animal for which he had not given a fourth of the above sum, and yet in whose pace and fencing he had the utmost confidence, with the additional delight of a certain find for the second fox—all these influences combined, were enough to put a man in thorough good humour with himself. To do our friend justice, he was not of a mercenary disposition; but having been kept exceedingly short of funds during his youth, and in those hard times hunted under considerable pecuniary difficulties, he had insensibly imbibed a horror of what he called "riding upon too much money." "A man must have good nerve," he used to say,

he, reflectively; "it strikes me he's about the best in my stable."

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"who is not afraid to risk a couple of hundred every time he jumps a fence;" and I really believe he would shove a forty-pound screw along with greater satisfaction than the winner of the Liverpool. The grey was a right good little nag, easy to turn, quick at his fences, and thoroughly accustomed to his master's hand. It is wonderful what a deal of time is saved by a horse that is pleasant to ride, and how rapidly a moderate galloper, with a fine mouth, and quick upon his legs, can slip over a country compared with an animal that may have the pace of a race-horse, but requires a segundo bridle, and a hundred-acre field to turn him in. Mr. Sawyer drew the curb rein gently through his fingers, stuck his heels down, and mingled in the crowd upon the best possible terms with himself.

As the smoking, laughing, chattering cavalcade trotted merrily along, to draw far-famed Glen Gorse, he had an opportunity of scanning many well-known individuals whom his business avocations of the morning had prevented his hitherto recognising. "The talent," as it is called, was present, from Melton—Melton, once the very metropolis of the hunting world, now, thanks to railroads, rivalled, if not surpassed, by Leicester and Market Harborough; and yet,

what a nice place it is! Who that has ever spent a season in the cosy, cheerful, joyous little town, but would wish to turn the stream of time, and live those golden days and pleasant nights over again?—would wish to be galloping his covert-hack once more through the fragrant air and under the dappled sky of a February morning, with a good horse to ride from Ranksborough Gorse or Barkby Holt, as his day's amusement, and a choice of at least a couple of invitations, offering him the pleasantest society *and* the best dinners in England, for his evening's gratification?

It is not more than thirty years since Nimrod wrote his celebrated "Quarterly Review Run"—the best description of *fashionable hunting* that has ever yet been printed, though many a hand, as light upon the bridle as the pen, has pourtrayed the same subject since then—not more than thirty years, certainly, and the ways of Melton are but little changed, only, of the *dramatis personæ* there are not many left. Of those who charged the flooded Whissendine so boldly, the majority have already crossed the Styx. Nevertheless, a few of the old lot may still be seen ready, when the hounds run, to face "wood and water," as of yore.

Mr. Sawyer, for an unimaginative man, was

the least thing in the world of a hero-worshipper. As he rode along, contemplating from behind them the fine powerful frame and the slim and graceful figure of two Meltonians, who for many years have shone, a couple of *lucida sidera*, in the front rank, and of whom, indeed, so fast have they always gone, it may almost be said that

"Panting Time toils after them in vain,"

he was accosted by the pleasant, gentlemanlike personage with whom he had spent an agreeable quarter of an hour in the hovel, on that memorable day when his ambition had so completely "cooked the goose" of Hotspur with the Pytchley.

"Good morning, sir," said this affable individual, bringing his horse alongside of our friend, with a bow such as nobody in the Old Country could ever have perpetrated. "I thought you'd be out to-day, so I've a couple here for you to look at."

When a nobleman not only touches his hat, but takes it off to you, at the same time offering you "a couple of horses to look at," as if he were about to make you a present of them, such politeness, thought Mr. Sawyer, is rather overwhelming than reassuring. He returned the greeting, however, with his best air, and took

off his hat in return, somewhat disconcerted, however, by the rude behaviour of Struggles and Brush, who were riding beside him, and who both burst out laughing.

The illustrious stranger, too—who, by the way, though still in a black coat, was "got up" with the utmost splendour of which a hunting costume admits—looked rather surprised, and winked at the two irreverent laughers as they are certainly *not* in the habit of winking in the House of Peers.

"Is that a favourite one you are riding?" inquired Mr. Sawyer, who fancied he must say something, and could think, at the moment, of no more apposite remark.

"I don't know much about him," was the reply. "He's only a five-year-old; and I haven't had him a fortnight. A thundering well-bred one, though, and can jump like a deer! I gave a hat-full of money for him, without getting on his back; but we'll see what he's made of this afternoon, I hope. I should say, now, that he'd carry *you* alarming!"

Mr. Sawyer, whose conversational powers were soon exhausted, made no reply, but, more out of civility than curiosity, contented himself with scanning the five-year-old from his ears to his tail.

The illustrious unknown seemed to have no dislike to inspection: on the contrary, he courted further companionship, by producing the gorgeous cigar-case, and offering Mr. Sawyer a weed.

"You will find them pretty good," said he, striking a light from a little *bijou* of a *brequet* that hung to his watch-chain. "I import them myself: it's the only way to ensure getting them first-rate, and it certainly is the cheapest in the long run."

The cigar was indeed excellent. Mr. Sawyer thought this would be a good opportunity to draw his noble friend for a box. He might perhaps make him a present of a couple of pounds or so. At all events, as he said, it was the cheapest plan: there was no harm in risking the chance of having to pay for them. He asked him, accordingly, with some little hesitation, if he could do him the favour of procuring him a few?

"Certainly, certainly," replied the other, in the most off-hand, good-humoured way possible. "You shall have them from my man. I'll write to him to-night. How much shall I order? You can't get anything like them at the money: they only stand us in *five guineas a pound!*"

Mr. Sawyer modestly opined "one pound would

be quite sufficient for the present;" but he felt as if he had just lost a large double tooth. Without being stingy, it was not the custom in the Old Country thus to throw money away. He fell back upon Brush, sucking at the costly tobacco with considerable vehemence.

"Who is he?" said he, nodding towards the rider of the five-year-old, then cantering on ahead, and sitting well down in the saddle, as he prepared to "lark" over a large fence, to the admiration of the field, instead of defiling through the hand-gate.

"Why, you seem to know him very well," rejoined Major Brush, smiling (as well he might) at the query: "I thought you seemed very thick, and were going to give him your custom."

Mr. Sawyer had not the heart to repudiate the soft impeachment. He liked to be "very thick" with a peer, and to have the credit of "giving him his custom" as a visitor and intimate.

"Yes," he said, "I am; but, somehow, I cannot, for the life of me, remember his title. I've no 'Debrett' at Harborough; and I've such a bad memory for names. Lord—Lord—what the deuce is it? Some Irish peerage, if I remember right?"

Major Brush fairly burst out laughing. "No

more a lord than *you* are, Sawyer," said he, "though, I grant you, he *ought* to be a Duke. I thought everybody knew Mr. Varnish, the horsedealer!" And the Major went off at score again, thinking what a capital story he had got against Sawyer for that day at dinner, and a good many days after. A joke, you see, lasts a long time in the hunting season, when the supply is by no means equal to the demand.

And Mr. Sawyer turned his horse's head out of the crowd, feeling a little humiliated, and not a little disgusted. The five guineas for the cigars stuck horribly in his throat. However, he and Mr. Varnish, as will presently be shown, had by no means closed accounts yet.

But where are the low spirits, blue devils, or uncomfortable reflections that can hold their own for an instant against the cheering sound of "Gone away!"? Three notes on the huntsman's horn, five or six couple of hounds streaming noiselessly across a field, the rest, more clamorous, leaping and dashing through the gorse, a rush of horsemen towards the point at which the fox has broken; and the man who is *really* fond of hunting has not the vestige of an idea to spare for anything else in the world.

John Standish Sawyer could ride "above a bit." Even in a strange country, and with

hounds running "like smoke," he was not a man to shrink from taking his own line; and scarcely valuing the grey, perhaps, according to its deserts, he had no scruple in risking that good little animal at whatever came in his way.

A quick turn to the five couple of leading hounds, that he spied racing down the side of a hedgerow, and the happy negotiation of a very nasty place, with a stake in it that would certainly have impaled a more costly nag, placed our friend on terms with the pack. A fine grass country lay spread out before him. The fox, evidently a good one, bore straight across the middle of the fields. The hounds, without forcing any extraordinary pace, appeared well settled to the scent, and not inclined to flash over it a yard. A large fence and a little brook had combined to afford them more room than usual. Everything seemed to look uncommonly like a run; and the Honourable Crasher, shooting by our friend, on Confidence, whom he rode with a shamefully loose rein, observed that "It was all right; and he shouldn't wonder if they were going to have a gallop."

Mr. Sawyer laid hold of the grey, and determined to assume a place in the front rank—of which the occupants would have been equally

at home in the row of stalls nearest the orchestra at the Opera. There was more than one lady riding as he never saw lady ride before—perfectly straight; turning aside from no obstacle; jumping a gate with extreme cordiality, if it should be locked; and taking it all in the earnest, yet off-hand, graceful manner, with which a woman sets about doing what she likes best. The Meltonians, stride for stride, and fence for fence, were sailing away with perfect ease, looking as if they were scarcely out of a canter; yet, do what he would—and it must be owned he was *very* hard upon the grey—Mr. Sawyer could not, for the life of him, decrease the distance between himself and these leading horsemen.

The Honourable Crasher, having got Confidence amongst some very intricate fences on the right, though a little wider than he liked of the hounds, was disporting himself therein with considerable gratification. Struggles and the Reverend Dove (to-day without the daughter) were forward with the flyers, though the former was already beginning to calculate on a check.

The double posts-and-rails about Norton-by-Galby were already visible; but the fox had evidently no intention of entering the gorse. Albeit much against the grain, and what he was

totally unaccustomed to in the Old Country, when hounds were running, Mr. Sawyer found himself obliged to ride to a leader. That chesnut five-year-old was for ever in front of him, now doing an "in-and-out" cleverly, now topping a flight of rails gallantly, then creeping under a tree, with a discretion beyond his years, and anon facing and rasping through a bullfinch, in the successful temerity of youth, Mr. Varnish sitting very far back the while, with the graceful ease of a man who is playing a favourite instrument in an arm-chair.

Presently the hounds checked, under Houghton-on-the-Hill; and Mr. Varnish, turning round to our friend, and casting his eye pitifully on the grey's sobbing sides, consigned them to reprobation for so doing, "just as the crowd was shook off, and the horses getting settled to their work!"

Mr. Sawyer's *dander* was up. It had been rising for the last two or three fences. He vowed, in his wicked heart, that chesnut should be his own before nightfall; and the way in which the young one jumped out of the Billesdon Road, when they got to work again, only confirmed him in his determination.

Long before the crowd could come clattering up the high-road, the pack and the first flight

had put a couple of grassy slopes once more between themselves and their pursuers. Considerable grief and discomfiture took place amongst the sportsmen, as must always be the case when hounds run straight, over Leicestershire. The holding pace at which they kept on, and the straight running of the fox, forbade the slightest chance of any but such as had got a good start at first, and stuck to them through thick and thin. Even these, well-mounted and skilful as they were, had enough to do. The fox never turned but once, under the Coplow; and five minutes afterwards he was in hand, held high above the huntsman's head, with the pack baying round him, in expectation of their reward.

Those who were there to see, it would be invidious to name. Sufficient for me to say that Mr. Sawyer was *not*, though he came up whilst Warrior and Woldsman were disputing the last bit of a hind-leg.

Despite his judicious riding and undeniable nerve, he had not the material under him that was quite adapted for so severe a country. The grey had neither pace for the extensive fields, nor scope for the large fences, each of which, though he did them so gallantly, entailed too great an exertion to bear frequent repetition.

Notwithstanding two falls, however, he struggled gamely to the end; and it speaks well both for man and horse, that they should have got there at all.

Mr. Sawyer, however, was now thoroughly bitten. He had never felt so keen in his life. He would never hunt anywhere else. He could ride with any of them, he thought: he was determined to be as well mounted. Mr. Varnish and he discussed the subject in all its bearings, as they rode home; and the result of their conversation was—the arrival of the chesnut five-year-old and a good-looking brown at Mr. Sawyer's stables, and the transference to Mr. Varnish, in lieu thereof, of the Honourable Crasher's cheque, and another signed in full with the perfectly solvent name of John Standish Sawyer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DOVE-COTE.

LET us take a peep into Dove-cote Rectory, smiling in the wintry sun, as it lies snugly sheltered from the north winds by a thick plantation, and rejoicing in that most desirable advantage in our climate—a southern aspect. This house is one that would make any sportsman oblivious of the tenth commandment. Who could refrain from coveting possession of those cheerful rooms; that fine extensive view; above all, the excellent and commodious stables within reach of three packs of hounds, and situated in the best grass country in England?

It is, however, with the *inside* of the mansion that we have now to do, and with those gentle beings who constitute a home, without whom a palace is little better than a dungeon.

Breakfast has been over at the Dove-cote for an hour or so. Cissy and her mamma have established themselves in what they call "the little drawing-room"—a snug apartment of

small dimensions, with windows opening to the ground, and "giving," as the French say, on a neatly laid-out garden, in spring and summer the peculiar care of the daughter of the house. To-day, however, flowers and blossoms are replaced by a million sparkling gems, formed by last night's white frost, which is melting rapidly under the noon-day sun. Inside, the furniture is of a rich and somewhat gaudy pattern, assorting well with the rose-tinted muslin curtains and multiplicity of looking-glasses, which are so characteristic of a lady's bower; whilst a thousand pretty knick-knacks, and a graceful litter of books, music, work, paper-lights, stray gloves, and gossamer handkerchiefs betray at once the sex of the occupants. A little statuette of a Cupid in tears, with nothing on but a quiver, occupies a niche between the windows, under a portrait of Miss Dove, depicted by the artist in a graceful attitude on the chesnut horse, attired in a blue riding-habit, with her hat off, and her hair falling about her shoulders, as, it is only right to observe, she is *not* in the habit of wearing it when taking equestrian exercise. Altogether, the painter's idea seems to have been borrowed from a French print entitled "The Rendezvous," representing a disconsolate damsel waiting for a gentleman

in a wood—not in the best of humours, as is natural under the circumstances, and sitting her white horse in a listless, woe-begone attitude, unworthy of an Amazon. The laggard, however, is perceptible in the far distance, making up for lost time on an exceedingly bad goer, whose "form" must at once absolve him of intentional unpunctuality in the eyes of his ladye-love. As a *pendant* to this work of art, hangs a portrait in *crayons* of Mrs. Dove, done some years ago, when people wore bunches of ringlets and a high comb at the back of the head—a fashion by no means unbecoming to the original, who must have been a sufficiently handsome young woman when she sat for this likeness. Indeed, the Reverend, no mean judge of "make-and-shape," always declared (at least in his wife's presence) that Cissy could not hold a candle to what her mother had been in her best days.

That matron, though somewhat voluminous in person and too highly coloured, is by no means bad-looking even now. As she sits at the window, shaping a little child's shirt for a poor parishioner (Mrs. Dove is a managing, bustling person—prejudiced, it may be, and deaf to argument, as what woman is not? but overflowing with the milk of human kindness),

a judicious artist might tone her down into a very picturesque study of "A lady in the prime of life."

She looks up from her work, and casts her eye across the trim garden over many a mile of undulating prairie, to where a dim smoke in the far distance denotes the locality of Harborough.

"Cissy," observes the matron, "wasn't that papa going round to the stables?"

Cissy raises those killing eye-lashes from her crochet, and dutifully replies—"Yes, mamma. He's only going to smoke his cigar as usual. I'm glad it's not a hunting day: we shall have him all to ourselves till luncheon."

Miss Dove pets her papa immensely; and it is needless to remark that, although on occasion he runs rusty with his wife, his daughter can wind him round her little finger at will.

"That reminds me," continues Mrs. D., in the inconsequent manner in which ladies follow out the thread of their reflections—"that reminds me we haven't had any visitors lately from over there," nodding with her head in the direction of Market Harborough.

Cissy looks very innocent in reply, and observes that "Gentlemen seem to make hunting the one great business of life."

Mamma, whose rest for the last five-and-

twenty years has been broken every winter whenever the nights have been symptomatic of frost, and who can scarcely be expected to share the anxiety which drives the Reverend at short intervals from the connubial couch to open the window and look out, is unable to controvert so self-evident a proposition; so she tries back on their Harborough friends.

"Mr. Crasher *never* comes except on Sundays, or when there is a hard frost; and the rest of the gang I would just as soon be without, for they *will* light their cigars in the hall—a thing I've quite broke your papa of doing, till the whole place smells like a public-house. But I do think that Mr. Sawbridge, or whatever his name is, might have called in common civility, if it was only to ask how you were after your long day."

Cissy was of the same opinion; but she adhered steadily to the crochet, and said nothing: perhaps she thought the more. She had confided to her mamma certain passages of the nocturnal ride into Market Harborough, and Mr. Sawyer's categorical answers to her very pertinent queries. I do not think, however, she had quite made what is called "a clean breast of it."

The mother, as is often the case in these days

of improvement, had scarcely so much force of character as the daughter. She never dared cross-question "Cissy" beyond a certain point. Not that the girl was rebellious, but she had a quiet way of setting her mamma down, which was as uncomfortable as it was irresistible.

Mrs. Dove, however, was not without her share of matronly cunning. She had been young herself, and had not forgotten it; nay, she felt quite young again sometimes, even now. It does not follow that because a lady increases in bulk she should decrease in susceptibility. Look at a German baroness—fifteen stone good. in her ball dress, and *æsthetic* to the tips of her plump fingers. Mamma got up to fetch her scissors; cut the little boy's shirt to the true *Corazza* pattern, and, holding up that ridiculous little garment as if to dry, went on with her argument.

"I don't think much of that Mr. Sawbridge after all, if you ask *me*," said she, looking over the collar full in her daughter's face. "He seems very shy, by no means good-looking, and I should say has not seen much of the world! Steadier perhaps than Brush, and not so stout as Struggles, but yet he don't give me the idea of a very gentleman-like person—like Mr. Crasher, for instance."

The Honourable was one of the good lady's great favourites. She admired hugely, as country dames will, his langour, his *insouciance*, his recklessness and dandyism—above all, his tendency to become torpid at a moment's notice, which latter faculty frequently provoked the strong-minded "Cissy" beyond endurance.

The girl's colour, always high, rose perceptibly. Like a true woman, she stood up for her new friend.

"Indeed, mamma," said she, "Mr. Sawyer is quite as gentleman-like as anybody we meet anywhere, and as for being shy, I confess I like people all the better for not being forward, like that rude Mr. Savage, who told me I should look hideous with my hair *à l'Impératrice*. Now, Mr. Sawyer at least *tries* to make himself agreeable."

"And seems to succeed, Cissy," rejoined mamma, with an arch smile that deepened the young lady's colour still more, and consequently heightened her resemblance to her buxom parent. "Well, dear, I must remind papa about asking some of them to dinner. Shall I tell him to send Mr. Sawbridge an invitation?"

"Really, I don't the least care," answered Miss Dove, with a toss of her shining black head. "I suppose you can't well leave him out. But,

mamma, I wish you would call the man by his right name. It isn't Sawbridge, but Sawyer."

"I'll try and remember, Cissy," answered her mother with another of those provoking smiles, which might have been too much for the young lady's equanimity, had not the entrance of the Reverend, bringing with him a strong perfume of tobacco, stables, and James' horse-blister, put an end to the *tête-à-tête*, and diverted Mrs. Dove's attack to her natural prey.

The Reverend was not in the best of humours. He had been feeling a horse's legs—the swelling of which no stimulant, however strong, seemed to be able to reduce. It *was* aggravating to make his hands smell like a chemist's shop, and at the same time to be aware that his favourite's legs were getting rounder and rounder under the application. It was *not* consolitary to be told by the groom that "the old 'oss was about wore out." Nor was it re-assuring to reflect that he wanted for half-a-dozen other purposes the couple of hundred it would take to replace him. These, however, are the annoyances to which hunting men are subject; the metaphorical thorns that bristle round our rose, and make her all the dearer and the sweeter for their sharpness. As he returned to the house *viâ* the pigsties, he could scarcely raise sufficient

interest to examine the lately-arrived litter of nine. Spotted black and white, they reminded him of foxhound puppies; and to the Reverend, short of horses as he was, the association was but suggestive of annoyance.

When he entered the little drawing-room, Mrs. Dove knew by his face that the moment was an unpropitious one at which to hazard a request for anything she wanted to obtain; but having managed him for a quarter-of-a-century, it would have been odd if she had not known exactly how to get her own way with him now.

"My dear," she said, "I've a letter from that man at Brighton about the house we had last year. He wants to know if we would like to engage it for a couple of months in the spring. It would be a good opportunity to give Cissy a little sea-bathing, you know."

Now, the Reverend had the same horror of that, as of other watering-places, which is usually entertained by middle-aged gentlemen of settled habits, who do not choose to accept second-rate dissipation and salt-water as equivalents for the comforts of a home. He had indeed, during the previous summer been seduced into spending two months at Brighton, under the erroneous impression that on those Sussex Downs the harriers hunted all the year round;

but, having found out his mistake, had inwardly registered a vow never to be "let in" for such a benefit again. It was no wonder that he rose freely at the suggestion.

"Gracious Heavens! Mrs. Dove!" exclaimed the Reverend, plumping down into an arm-chair, and raising both hands in irritable deprecation, "knowing what you do, how can you ask such a question? Of course, if this house is too uncomfortable to live in, and it don't matter about the parish going to the d— to the dogs, and the Bishop is to be a nonentity, and *my* duties a farce, you are perfectly right to go gadding about from here to Brighton, and from Brighton to London, and from London to Halifax if you like, and I shall be too happy to indulge you. I only wish you would tell me where the money is to come from—where the money is to come from, Mrs. Dove—that's all!" And, having thus spoken, the Reverend took up the *Leicester Journal*, and looked over the top of it at his wife, as if he had indeed propounded *a poser*.

This was exactly what that dear artful woman wanted. She knew that when he had blown off his steam, her husband would settle down into his usual easy temper, and become perfectly malleable in about five minutes. So she folded the poor parishioner's little shirt with the nicest

accuracy, and replied in the most perfect good-humour :—

"Well, dear, I'm sure I don't want to move from here till we go to London. You know I'm so fond of my garden in the spring, and I like you to get your hunting as long as you can: it does you so much good. My idea is, London about the time of the Derby; then Ascot for a week; and home again by the beginning of July. After all, we are wonderfully well-situated here for the country as regards society, and Harborough never was so full as it seems this season. What should we do in this part of the world if it wasn't for hunting?"

Precious, in proportion to their rarity, opinions so orthodox sank like music in the Reverend's ear. Five-and-twenty years' experience had failed to teach him, that such congenial sentiments must as necessarily be followed by a request, as a soft southerly wind is succeeded by rain. And this is the strangest feature in our subservience to the other sex. Though they deceive us ninety-nine times, we believe them the hundredth, and, more foolish than the feathered biped, though its meshes be spread in our very sight, rush open-eyed, neck-and-heels into the net of the fowler.

The Reverend glanced at the wife of his

bosom, and thought her wonderfully like that picture done a score of years ago. He said as much: but the compliment by no means diverted Mrs. Dove from the object she had in view. "Cissy and I were just talking," said she, simply, "of your friend Mr. Crasher, and the rest of them. By the bye, you really ought to ask some of them to dinner. There's a barrel of oysters come by rail last night, and our turkeys this year are finer than usual. Better say Tuesday, don't you think, papa?" added she coaxingly.

But the Reverend was not so hospitably inclined as he would have been had the old horse been sound. "They can have plenty of oysters at Harborough," said he. "They won't care to drive all that way in the dark. Bad roads, wet nights, perhaps, and nobody to meet them. Better put it off, I think, Dottie, till the days get a little longer."

You or I would hardly have thought of calling so ample a lady as Mrs. Dove, whose baptismal name indeed was Dorothy, by the above diminutive. Nevertheless, when in his best humour, it was the Reverend's habit to address her by the old pet name, and she returned to the charge accordingly.

"Better do it at once, dear," she replied. "The

end of the season comes upon us before we know where we are. And if frost should arrive, or anything, they are all off to London by the express train. As for not liking to come, they'll *jump* at it! Mr. Crasher says yours is the best claret within three counties, and I'm sure you all sit long enough at it to appreciate its merits. How you *will* talk about hunting: won't they, Cissy? Well, we can't wonder at it—gentlemen are so enthusiastic. Why, if I was a man, with such wine as *that*, I'd sell 'em every horse in my stable before coffee came in."

The Reverend burst out laughing. The last argument was irresistible. "Have it your own way, Dottie," said he: "I must be off to write my sermon." And he betook himself to his study accordingly, leaving his wife and daughter to issue these invitations.

Of these it is unnecessary for us to trace the delivery of more than one. Mr. Sawyer, eating devilled kidneys the following morning for breakfast, felt his heart leap into his mouth at the reception of a primrose-coloured, highly-scented billet, in a long narrow envelope, bearing on the reverse what is called a "monogram"—a thing not unlike the puzzle-wit lock on a gate—consisting of the letter D and others twisted into every variety of shape. Though his experience

in ladies' letters was limited, being indeed confined to one from Miss Mexico at the conclusion of their intercourse, in which she "wished to have no further communication with him, but hoped always to remain *friends*," something told him that the delicate, neatly-written superscription must have been indited by a fair hand. For an instant, the delightful suggestion flashed across him, that Miss Dove, forgetting maidenly reserve in the ardour of her affection, had plunged into a correspondence with himself, and he turned hot and cold by turns. Opening the missive with a trembling hand, it proved to be, if not from the young lady, at least from her mamma, and as it lay open all that day on his table, it is no breach of confidence on my part to publish its contents for the reader's benefit. Thus it ran :—

"DEAR MR. SAWYER,

"Can you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner on Tuesday next, at half-past seven o'clock? Mr. Dove desires me to say that as you will probably drive, you had better not attempt the short way, but come by the high-road. My daughter unites with me in hoping that your poor horse has recovered the hard day in which he carried you so well, and I remain,

"Dear Mr. Sawyer,

"Yours sincerely,

"DOROTHY DOVE.

"Dove-cote Rectory, Friday."

There is nothing ambiguous in the above. It seems a simple invitation to dinner enough ; you or I can gather its drift at a glance. Why the man should have read it over at least half-a-dozen times is more than I can divine.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE BOOT ON THE OTHER LEG."

MEANWHILE in the stable of the Honourable Crasher is considerable consternation and bewilderment. The helpers look wise, and wink at each other, as they pass from stall to stall, in the execution of their duties. Mr. Tiptop is completely at his wit's end. Can he, the knowing Tiptop, looked up to as the great unerring authority on training, pace, weight for age, and other racing mysteries—Newmarket all over—can he have made a mistake? He begins to think, not only that he *can*, but that he *has*.

First of all they gave the hapless Marathon a spin with Chance, as a mere breather, and I have already said with what result.

Mr. Tiptop being determined to get at "the rights of it," then tried the horses a mile at even weights; the consequences admitted of less doubt than ever. Marathon's "form" was so obviously bad, that the groom concluded he must be amiss.

"Why, he can't go no faster than our mare can trot," soliloquised Mr. Tiptop, as he contemplated the bay grinding away at his afternoon's feed (to do Marathon justice, he was always good at this part of his day's work), and thought that the animal did by no means show to advantage amongst his stable companions. "Can he be one of those extraordinary horses as I've heard of, wot can scarcely wag without they're trained a'most to fiddle-strings, but as nothing mortal can touch if once you gets them fit." He almost persuaded himself that the new purchase must indeed be such a phenomenon, and resolved on putting him through a severe course of physic, and into strong training forthwith. Before, however, resorting to such ulterior measures, he had the wisdom to think of applying to old Isaac for a solution of the mystery.

He found the senior busy in his little saddle-room, engaged in no less important an occupation than the improvement of The Boy's morals and general deportment, for which I grieve to observe, since his arrival at Harborough, there was sufficient room. The youth, though he worked hard, was seldom sober now, and never told the truth but by accident. Isaac's method of imparting ethical instruction was uncompromising, if not agreeable. With the lad's collar

in one hand, and a spare stirrup-leather in the other, he insisted forcibly on those maxims which he considered most salutary to the tender mind, accompanying each with a stinging illustration from the strap; the dialogue between the sage and his disciple being conducted much in this wise:—

Isaac: "I've told you over and over again, ye young warmint, and I'll tell it ye every day I live, if I larrup the skin off ye." (Whack.)

The Boy: "Oh, please!"

Isaac: "You'll never rise in life, nor be fit to be called a stableman, without you can work them qualities which have made *me* what I am; that's what I am a teaching of ye." (Whack.)

The Boy: "Oh, please!"

Isaac: "First and foremost, sobriety"—(Whack, and "Oh, please!") "Secondly, honesty, coupled with early rising"—(Whack again, and a howling "Oh, please!" from the pupil.) "Thirdly and lastly, sobriety"—(Whack). "I'll go over 'em again; them's the three cardinal virtues. You mind what I'm a tellin' ye—Sobriety, honesty, coupled with early rising, and sobriety"—(Whack, whack, whack; and "Oh, please! oh, please! oh, please!")

At this juncture, Mr. Tiptop entered. Casting an approving glance at the mode of treat-

ment adopted, he seated himself on an inverted stable-bucket, and professed his readiness to wait old Isaac's leisure ere he asked to have "a word with him." The other let go of The Boy's collar—who darted from the place like a weasel—and put on his own coat and hat. Thus armed, he waited to hear what his guest had to say. Mr. Tiptop broached the subject at once.

"Rum go, this here!" said he, hoisting his hat on to his eyebrows. "Uncommon queer start it is, about your bay horse. Can't get him *out*, I can't, do what I will with him; the beggar seems well, too, and pretty fit, as far as I see, and I've trained a few of them! If I didn't *know* he was a smartish nag now, I should say he was as slow as an eight-day clock when it runs down. What am I to think of it?"

Isaac's little blue eyes twinkled for an instant, but turned to stone once more, as he replied slowly, "Think of it? Well, it seems to *me*, now, that he won't be much use to your governor if he can't win."

"Not he!" answered Mr. Tiptop, contemptuously. "I could have told *you* that. What I want to know is, why the beggar was so much better in your stable than in ours? Come, old chap! you and me has always been good friends,

give us an *item* now; what would you do with him, if you was me?"

Isaac's face altered not a muscle, nor did the eyes twinkle now, while he replied gravely, "If I was in your shoes, Mr. Tiptop, *this* is what I'd do—I'd put him into this here race surelie, and *lay agin him for the very shirt on my back!*"

And like the Pythian of old, Isaac having thus delivered himself, could by no means be brought back to the subject. If Mr. Tiptop had looked puzzled when he entered the veteran's saddle-room, the expression of his countenance, as he emerged from it, was that of a man whom mystery has so completely enfolded in her web, that he has no energy left to make an effort for escape. That he was so utterly bamboozled as to have recourse to his own master, thus risking his authority over the Honourable for ever after, may be gathered from the conversation held between the latter and Mr. Sawyer over their last cigar, before separating for the night, about two P.M. The Honourable, with an air of cordial approval, as that of a man who is paying another a well-merited compliment, drawls out—

"That's an awful brute you sold me, Sawyer, —that bay of yours. You were quite right to part with him. My fellow tells me he can't go a yard: wants me to ride him myself; told him

I'd rather not, if I can *walk* as fast. Do you think there's anything wrong with him, or used he *always* to gallop as if his legs were tied?"

This is not a very easy question for the former owner to answer, asked, as it is, in the Honourable's off-hand careless manner. Mr. Sawyer thinks of trying the "virtuous indignation" tack; reflects that under the circumstances it would only make him ridiculous, and that thoroughly to carry it out, he ought to be prepared to take back the horse, a measure that in his wildest moments he has never contemplated, and finally subsides into a good-humoured smile, and affirms—

"We thought him a fair horse enough in the Old Country. Perhaps he don't shine so bright amongst your clippers. He's a sound, good-constitutioned beast, too, and *never* off his feed; that I can answer for, and you've seen him jump. I am sorry you don't like him; but if you wanted a race-horse, you know, that sort of thing is quite out of my line."

The Honourable, who is good-nature itself, laughs heartily. "I don't hate him as much as Tiptop does; and if worst comes to worst, he's good-looking enough for harness. By the bye, old fellow, do you dine over at Dove-cote to-morrow?"

"Well, I've been *asked*," replied our friend, as if he hadn't set his heart upon going, and been thinking of it ever since. "Why?" he adds, smothering a blush, as he thinks his companion may have found out his secret, and is laughing in his sleeve.

"Only that we're all going," rejoins the Honourable: "I'm glad to hear you are not to be left in the lurch. It's a fearful road, and an infernal long way; but Dove gives you such '41 as is not to be got anywhere else, and a skinful of it, my boy, not forgetting to drink his own share. I like the mother Dove, too, and pretty Miss 'Cissy' is always good fun!"

Sawyer felt the blood tingling in his ears. Amongst the many annoyances that gird as with briars the man who is sufficiently ill-advised to take an interest in any one but himself, not the least is that ridiculous sensitiveness to remarks, hazarded by the most careless of bystanders on the "object" or its belongings. If it is praised, we are jealous; if censured, we are angry; and if not mentioned at all, we are disappointed. That Mr. Sawyer, who had no more "vested interest" in her than the Lord Chancellor, should feel annoyed at Miss Cissy being spoken of as "good fun," by so amiable a critic as the Honourable Crasher, only shows the absurd

organisation of the human mind, and how careful we should be never to put off that armour of selfishness and self-conceit, with which nature has provided us for our self-defence.

Mr. Sawyer made a move towards his bed-candle.

"Good-night, old fellow," said the Honourable. "By Jove! we'll go together to-morrow to the Dove-cote. I'll drive you there in my phaeton; and, by Jove! we'll put that bay horse of yours in, and see how he goes with a trap behind him—so we will."

The Honourable appeared so delighted with his own suggestion, that it was impossible to controvert it; but as Mr. Sawyer wound up his watch and deposited it on his dressing-table, it certainly occurred to him that there was such a thing as retribution even at Market Harborough.

CHAPTER XX.

DEEPER AND DEEPER.

To walk a horse twice round a grass-field, in a set of light harness, allowing him afterwards to stand for half-an-hour in the stable, without taking it off, can scarcely be called a thorough breaking-in of the animal to the duties of a coach-horse. Such, nevertheless, was all the tuition vouchsafed by the Honourable Crasher to Marathon's inexperience, ere the bay found himself placed alongside of another, in that gentleman's phaeton, for the purpose of taking his former and present owner out to dinner.

His companion—no other than the redoubtable chesnut which Crasher had been riding to covert on his first introduction to our friend—would have been rated as an experienced break-horse by few persons less reckless than his master. He was what is called "a bad starter," but made up for that deficiency by being as difficult to stop, when once off, as he was at first

to set in motion. He had a way, too, of hugging the pole when out of humour, most subversive of his companion's equanimity. Such tricks were, doubtless, against the progress of Marathon's education. Altogether, a more unpleasant pair, for locomotive purposes, have seldom been "lapped in leather."

There is no proverb more true than that "where there is no fear, there is no danger." The Honourable Crasher's nerves seemed not only totally insusceptible to the unworthy sensation

"Which schoolboys denominate 'funk,'"

but he appeared utterly to ignore the possibility of anything like a casualty, wherever horseflesh was concerned. The consequence was that, both in the saddle and on the coach-box, he came scathless out of scrapes that must have been fatal to a man of a more nervous temperament.

I will not dwell on the drive from Market Harborough to the Dove-cote—on the tension of Mr. Sawyer's nerves, and corresponding rigidity of his muscles, whenever the wheel grazed a heap of stones, or an ominous bang against the splash-board reminded him that Marathon had not forgotten how to kick. The

Boy, indeed—selected for the office as being of light weight—spent most of the journey on the hind-step, prepared for the worst, but was not obliged to get down and run to their heads more than a dozen times in the course of as many minutes, after which they settled to their work, and pulled like griffins. It is sufficient to say that, when they arrived at the Rectory-door, close on the tracks of the ignominious fly that had preceded them at least half-an-hour, Mr. Sawyer's white tie was unrumpled, and the Honourable's whiskers still in tolerable curl.

There was but one stranger present. The Reverend knew how to give a dinner, or, if *he* didn't, his wife did, and had too much consideration for his Harborough friends to inundate them with a host of country neighbours with whom they were not acquainted. This exception was a widowed cousin of Mrs. Dove's—a voluble lady, not so young as she had been, wearing her shoulders very bare, her dress very full, and her fair hair puffed out with considerable ingenuity. She was a little rouged, a little made-up, but very good-looking notwithstanding, in a *blonde*, full-blown, boisterous style. A better foil for "Cissy" could scarcely be imagined. This buxom beauty answered to the name of Merrywether, and,

to all appearance, would have had no objection to change it.

I pass over the drawing-room ceremonials, generally somewhat dreary before dinner, and only enlivened, in the present instance, by the personal daring of Major Brush, whose idiosyncrasy compelled him at once to constitute himself Mrs. Merrywether's devoted admirer, and will ask my reader to imagine the company fairly settled at table (circular, with a quantity of light, and flowers), the soup sipped, the first glass of sherry swallowed, turbot and lobster sauce travelling leisurely round —in short, to use a hunting metaphor, which most of the guests would understand, their fox found and run into, and broken up with much *gusto* and satisfaction. "Whoop! Worry! worry! worry! Tear him and eat him!"

Mr. Sawyer has got a good start, and a good place. He did not succeed in taking the daughter of the house in to dinner; for Struggles' stout figure was in the way, and he could not get by till that jolly personage had unwittingly offered his arm. He secured the chair, however, on the other side, and thought he spied the least shade of disappointment, succeeded by one of the brightest looks, as he did so. He

was consoled accordingly, and, after the sherry, not so shy as usual.

Crasher, of course, in virtue of his rank, took in their hostess, who was supported on her other hand by Savage. Mrs. Merrywether sat between the Reverend and Brush. Everybody talked at once; and the champagne was beyond praise.

Miss Dove was very agreeable, sharing her attentions with great impartiality between Struggles and the agitated Sawyer; only, when she addressed the latter, she used a somewhat lower tone than to any one else. The dodge has a prodigious effect on a man who is not up to it; and our friend was honest and inexperienced enough, where women were concerned. He felt in the seventh heaven, and more inclined for drinking than eating—always a bad sign. What is left to fall back upon, when the stomach is affected by the maladies of the heart?

Not so Struggles. When she had seen the latter wholly engrossed in the merits of a "*vol-au-vent*," Miss Dove turned her pretty face and dangerous attention to her other cavalier.

"You've never asked me how I got home that dark night," said she. "A long drive in the

wet is no joke, after such a hard day. I dare say you've forgotten all about it, Mr. Sawyer." And the eyelashes went down till they swept the delicate peach-like cheek.

Our friend *looked* unutterable things. He could think of nothing more appropriate to *say*, however, than that "He—he hoped she hadn't caught cold."

Cissy laughed outright as she replied, "You wrapped me up too well for any fear of that. Do I *look* as if I had?" she added, lifting the eyelashes, and fixing our friend with one of her killing looks, as you run a great cockchafer right through the body with a pin.

You see, Mr. Sawyer wanted a good deal of bringing on; and the little witch encouraged him accordingly.

"You look remarkably well," said he, mustering courage, and proceeding desperately, as, when once a shy man begins, he is always the boldest. "I never saw anything so becoming as that dress. The effect is perfectly lovely."

"Hush!" replied Cissy: "you mustn't say *that*. *There's* our beauty. If you talk of loveliness, I am sure you must be perfectly smitten with *that*," nodding towards Mrs. Merrywether as she spoke, and drawing his attention to the charms of that lady, who was *fair*, whereas

Cissy herself was more of a brunette, and thus smoothing the way for another compliment.

"I don't admire such light hair," replied the gentleman, whose own *chevelure* was of the sandiest; "and she wants expression; and her eyes are too far apart; and people's skins should be even whiter than hers to admit of such *very* low dresses."

Why are ladies always pleased when *other* ladies' dresses are thought too low? Cissy was not above the prejudices of her sex. She gave him a bewitching smile, and called him "a ridiculous creature."

Even Mr. Sawyer could not misinterpret such signs of favour. Whatever Miss Mexico may have *thought*, she had never called him "a ridiculous creature" in her life.

"What I admire," he proceeded, stealing a look at Miss Cissy, as he enumerated her personal advantages, "is more colouring, darker hair, and arched eyebrows, and deeper eyes, long eyelashes, and altogether a fresher and brighter style of beauty—in short, I don't think she would look at all well in a white dress with cherry-coloured trimmings."

It was the very dress she wore herself. There was no mistake, thought the fair angler: she had *hooked* him. So she gave him another of

the captivating glances, and changed the conversation by drawing his attention to her fan, of which the fragrant sandal-wood only added fuel to his flame, while she turned to Struggles, who, having made an excellent dinner, was vainly endeavouring to talk to her about the coming ball.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Merrywether, whose most prejudiced detractor could not have accused her, at this juncture, of wanting *expression*, was forcing the running with the agreeable Brush. She was shaking her head, and making eyes, and showing her teeth, and flourishing her shoulders at him, with a degree of energy that must have been fatal to a less experienced campaigner. The Major, however, was proof against all the usual weapons of the female armoury. A confirmed flirt, it was his habit just to stop short of love-making with every woman he sat next to; but, if truth must be told, he never yet had seen one whose attractions he could place in comparison with his cutlet, his champagne, his claret, and his after-dinner cigar. A good-humoured, brainless, easy-going *bon-vivant*, it was the Major's eventual destiny to marry a learned lady, with blue spectacles, under whose dynasty he faded away, and was lost to the world altogether.

But with this, at present, we have nothing to do.

Mrs. Merrywether was quite willing to take him as he was. Before the cheese was off the table, he had settled an expedition to the Crystal Palace with her, the first time they were both in London, and secured a flower from her bouquet, which he placed, with much mock-devotion, in a glass of sherry-and-water. Also, on the departure of the ladies, he dived for, and brought to the surface, the following articles, the property of the efflorescent widow: One French fan—epoch, Louis-Quatorze; one pair of white gloves, bound with ribbon, and numbered six and three-quarters; one gold vinaigrette, with tiny chain complete; and one lace-edged handkerchief, with a square inch of cambric in the middle—it is presumed, in case of necessity, to dry the fair mourner's tears.

After this crowning feat, he threw himself back in his chair, and settled to his host's claret, like a man who is thoroughly well satisfied with himself.

Never was a dinner that went off better. Mrs. Dove had Savage to listen to, who was well-informed, and Crasher to look at, who was well dressed. Struggles and Dove were congenial souls, and, if once they could get together unin-

terrupted, would talk about hunting by the hour. Mrs. Merrywether was pleased with her dinner; pleased with her neighbour; also —for she knew, even before she went to the glass in the drawing-room, that she was looking her best — pleased with herself. Cissy was satisfied; Sawyer enchanted; and Crasher, looking forward with lazy gratification to a dangerous drive in the dark, was in higher spirits than usual.

We will leave the ladies to their tea and coffee, undisturbed. The gentlemen close up round their host. A dry biscuit and a magnum of the undeniable make their appearance. The parson fills out a bumper of the rosy fluid, and proposes his first and only toast — "Fox-hunting!"

Each man drinks it with thirsty satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAGNUM BONUM.

When the Reverend's butler came in the first time with a fresh supply of claret, he found the assembled guests making themselves happy each in his own way. His master and Struggles were crossing the Skeffington Lordship with great enthusiasm, in an imaginary run with Mr. Tailby's hounds. Brush was expatiating on the merits of the vintage to the Honourable Crasher, who, saying but little in reply, was smiling faintly, and denoting his approval by the regularity with which he charged and emptied his glass. Savage, who dabbled in science, was explaining to Sawyer with considerable perspicuity, a new discovery termed phonography, by which sounds or vibrations of air are to be taken down as they arise, upon the principle of the photograph, and which, when thoroughly perfected and carried out, will make it no longer an impertinence to request a bystander "not to look at you in that tone of voice," and flattered

himself that so good a listener must be imbibing stores of valuable information from his remarks; Mr. Sawyer, however, was lost in delicious dreams, tinged, as the decanter waned, with rosier and rosier hues. He was, for the moment, unconscious of Savage, of Brush, of Crasher, and only recognised the Reverend as the purveyor of the best claret he had ever drunk, and the father of such an angel as all England could not match.

The second time the white-waistcoated functionary arrived with "another of the same," things wore a far different aspect. Everybody was talking at once on the same subject. Like a bag-fox before an unruly pack of hounds, the topic of steeple-chasing had been started for the general confusion, and each ran his own line and threw his tongue for his own especial encouragement; there seemed no doubt about the long-talked-of race coming off. Preliminaries were adjusted, weights discussed, and a country suggested. Even Struggles seemed to have got over his aversion to the mongrel sport. But on the stout Ganymede's third and last appearance with "the landlord's bottle," the storm was at its loudest, Mr. Sawyer laying down the law with the best. Betting books were out: even the Reverend had produced what he called "some memorandums;" and the only intelligible sounds, amidst

the clamour, were the ominous words "five-to-two"—current odds which everybody seemed to lay, and nobody to take. The discreet servant then whispered to his master that a second edition of coffee was ready to go into the drawing-room, and ere long a glass of brown sherry all round screwed our friend's courage up to face the ladies once more.

Each man accordingly composed his features into a vacant simper, pulled his neckcloth up, and his wristbands down, and straddled into the presence of those indulgent beings, with an abortive attempt to look as if he, individually, had been drinking little or no wine.

Cissy was at the pianoforte. If Mr. Sawyer had thought her charming before, what must have been his opinion of that sparkling young lady now, seen through the medium of a fair share of champagne at dinner, and the best part of two bottles of claret afterwards? Lights, dress, and a general atmosphere of luxury and refinement, have a wonderful effect in enhancing the attractions of the fair. Alas, that we should have lived to admit it! Though the poet may opine that "beauty unadorned is adorned the most," our hackneyed taste cannot but confess that it prefers the French maid's *coiffure* to the dishevelled tresses; the trim silk stocking, and

neat satin shoe, to the slippers down at heel; and the shapely *corsage*, with its abundant *crinoline*, to the limp and unassuming dressing-gown. Mr. Sawyer was quite satisfied with Cissy as she was.

The musician was playing "The Swallows," or "The Humming Bird," or "The Spring Geese;" Sawyer had no ear for music, and neither knew nor cared which. She just glanced at him as he entered the room, but the encouragement was sufficient to lead him to the instrument.

"How *long* you have been," said Miss Cissy in a low voice, without looking up, rattling away at the keys in the loudest of *finales*, with a vehemence that drowned her observations to all ears but her admirer's. Then she closed the instrument, whispered papa to order the whist-table, and went and sat on the sofa by Mrs. Merrywether in such a position that Mr. Sawyer couldn't possibly get at her.

They do not read Izaak Walton, these young women, and yet how well they know how to play their fish! Is it constant reflection and mutual discussion, I wonder, that makes the least experienced of them such skilful anglers? or is it not rather an intuitive sagacity, akin to that with which the kitten teases her ball of

cotton as dexterously as the cat does a full-grown mouse? They suck it in, the science of man-taming, I am inclined to believe, with their mothers' milk. Mamma was just the same, doubtless; and grand-mamma too, whom she can just remember, with a cough and crutches, and so on, up to Eve.

With the good-humoured Struggles for a partner, and so much of his brains as the claret had left untouched, filled with the image of a dark-eyed young person in white muslin, it was Mr. Sawyer's lot to do battle at the noble game of whist, against two no less formidable antagonists than Savage and Parson Dove, both first-rate performers even after dinner.

To be successful at this pastime, a man's whole intellects should be engrossed by the cards, and this was by no means the case with our friend. In spite of his partner's good-humoured entreaties to "pay attention," he could not prevent his thoughts, and sometimes his eyes, from wandering to the sofa near the fire-place. He had never liked Brush quite as well as the rest of his companions, but on the present occasion he could not refrain from wishing him even in a hotter place than that which he had selected. The Major with devoted gallantry, having placed his back to a fire that would have roasted an

ox, was holding forth in his most agreeable manner to Mrs. Merrywether and the laughing Cissy. Crasher, in the easiest of arm-chairs, was helping Mrs. Dove to make paper-lights, and revolving in his own mind, while he listened amiably to the continuous discourse of his hostess, whether he wouldn't pole up Marathon a little shorter going home, and try the more direct road against which the Reverend was in the habit of warning his guests. They would save a mile, in distance, he thought, and there was sure to be more light on their return. The Honourable had a sort of vague idea, that there was always a moon about one or two o'clock.

Suddenly an explosion of laughter from the widow, under cover of which the unconscious Sawyer revoked, and was immediately found out, startled the whole assembly. "How absurd you are!" exclaimed that noisy dame, in answer to some proposition of the Major's which appeared highly amusing to the ladies on the sofa. "Now I appeal to 'Cissy' whether she agrees with you. Girls are the best judges. Cissy! *do* you think the Major as invincible as he says he is?"

Mr. Sawyer, on thorns to hear the answer, trumped his partner's best with considerable emphasis, and lost *another* trick.

"It's not fair to ask *me*," answered Miss Dove, laughing heartily. "He knows I admire him *immensely*; I've always told him so!" and the three went on with their conversation, which, I am bound to say, was great nonsense, but amused them considerably all the same.

After this, Struggles thought the sooner they left off whist the better. There is scarcely a mistake, of which that intricate game admits, into which Mr. Sawyer did not rush, so to speak, as if with a suicidal purpose. "Hang the fellow!" thought Struggles, eyeing his partner with a kind of good-humoured astonishment: "if he was drunk, one could understand it; never saw such a thing! never saw such cards so thrown away! and yet the man's no fool. Oh! he *must* be drunk! *must* be! but carries his liquor with discretion!" and thereupon Struggles found himself looking upon his partner's features with a more indulgent eye, and contemplating his own losses with the resignation of a man who suffers in a good cause.

Three rubbers! one of them a bumper! How many points, for the sake of my hero, I am ashamed to confess. It was indeed, as Struggles pathetically remarked, "about the worst night he'd ever had, since he left Westminster."

Yet there was balm in Gilead, after all. The

Honourable, resisting all entreaties to stay and have some supper, rang to order his phaeton round, and went fast asleep in his arm-chair after the exertion. Their host, exhilarated by his winnings, and in high good-humour, began again about the steeple-chase; and the ladies, who, I am convinced, patronise these exhibitions chiefly on account of the silk jackets, and connect them remotely in their own minds with a fancy dress ball, began to betray great curiosity on the subject of the "colours of the riders," "*gorge de pigeon*," the Major's selected hue, having decidedly the call. During the discussion which so favourite a topic was sure to engender, it came out, somehow, that Mr. Sawyer was going to take part in the hazardous amusement —an announcement which he made darkly, and with a sidelong glance at Cissy, that seemed to say he would rather break his neck than not. The young lady having teased him enough, was quite ready to meet him half-way. "Isn't it very dangerous?" said she, with clasped hands and a look of affectionate interest. "Are you *really* going to ride, Mr. Sawyer? oh! how I *hope* you'll win!" And down went the eyelashes once more.

After that, what cared Mr. Sawyer for rubbers, bumpers, points, and losses? Everything

was *couleur de rose* again. Whilst the others gathered round the wine-and-water tray, he sank down on the sofa by her side, and for a delicious five minutes had his enslaver all to himself. In that brief period, he managed to find out her favourite colour, and promised to adopt it in the coming steeple-chase. A few stars were twinkling dimly through the cloudy atmosphere when he lit his cigar and got into the phaeton by the Honourable's side. Why couldn't Mr. Sawyer look at them without thinking of Cissy Dove?

CHAPTER XXII.

A WET NIGHT.

"SIT tight," exclaimed the Honourable, as the phaeton bumped forcibly against the stone post of the Rectory entrance, and proceeded into the road with what sailors call "a considerable slue to port," consequent on that brute Marathon hugging the pole and setting his mouth with pig-headed obstinacy. "I *must* pitch into you!" added the driver, suiting the action to the word, and administering heavy punishment to the transgressing animal—a discipline which Marathon resented by kicking hard against the splash-board; whilst the chesnut, a sensitive, high-couraged five-year-old, was driven almost mad by the sounds of repeated flagellation. "Are you nervous on wheels?" added the charioteer quietly, as he felt his companion's leg stiffen itself against his own with the instinctive rigidity of apprehension. "Nervous!" forsooth! Ask Launcelot fresh from the presence of Guenevere, or Charles Brandon tilting before the

young Dauphiness of France, or Bothwell with his armour buckled on by Mary Stuart, if those doughty champions were afraid; but forbear to put so ridiculous a question at a moment like the present to John Standish Sawyer. "*Nervous*, indeed!" Our friend pressed his hat firmly on his head, folded his arms across his chest, and laughed grimly in his questioner's face. "All right, old fellow!" said he; "drive on! "if you like to the devil!"

"He's a rare plucked one," thought the Honourable to himself, as he started the horses in a gallop, apparently with no other view than that of arriving at the destination proposed. The night was dark, and threatening rain as it clouded over rapidly; the way intricate, full of turns and difficulties; and the Boy, it is needless to observe, helplessly drunk in the rumble. He would have been a venturous speculator who had taken five to one that they arrived safe at Market Harborough.

The wheels flew round with frightful velocity, scattering the mud profusely over the occupants of the carriage. The horses with lowered heads laid themselves down to their work, pulling wildly. The Honourable's arms were extended, and his feet thrust forward. He would not have admitted it, but it looked

very much as if they were running away with him.

"An't they getting a little out of your hand?" asked Mr. Sawyer, hazarding the question in its mildest form, as he recognised Marathon's well-known manner of putting down his head when he meant mischief; and calculated if anything *should* give way, whereabouts his own body would shoot to, at that pace.

"Only going free," answered Crasher with the utmost composure, though his cigar was burnt all the way down one side to his lips by the current of air created in the rapidity of their transit. "Remarkably free — but I like phaeton horses to run up to their bits."

"*Do you?*" thought Mr. Sawyer; but, despite the enthusiasm and the claret, and the romance of the whole evening, he wished himself anywhere else. Independent of the ignominious ending of being dashed to pieces out of a phaeton, it *would* be hard lines never to see Cissy Dove again. However, there was nothing for it but to sit still and trust to Crasher's coachmanship. Anything like expostulation with that gentleman he felt would be worse than useless.

I recollect to have seen or heard somewhere an anecdote of the celebrated "Hell-fire Dick,"

which exhibits such *sang-froid* in a dangerous predicament as to be worth repeating. Dick, then, who had attained his flaming *soubriquet* by the dashing pace and general recklessness with which he drove, was not only one of the most skilful of the old-fashioned Long coachmen, but was equally noted for the cool imperturbability of his demeanour and the suavity of his replies. One very dark night, whilst proceeding at his usual pace, he was so unfortunate as to get off the road on a common where several gravel pits yawning on each side for his reception made the mistake as dangerous as it was disagreeable. With a tremendous lurch the coach swung over one of these ready-made graves, and there was just light enough to perceive the fifteen feet or so of sheer descent yawning for its victims. "Where have you got to now, Dick?" exclaimed the box-passenger, in accents of pardonable irritation and alarm. "Can't say, sir," replied Dick, with the utmost politeness, while they were all turning over together—"Can't say, I'm sure—*never was here before!*"

Now, if the Honourable Crasher had been going to be shot the next minute, it is my firm conviction that impending destruction would not have ruffled his plumes, nor agitated the languor

of his accustomed manner in the slightest degree. Whether such a temperament is entirely natural, or is not rather to a certain extent the result of education enhanced by what we must call the affectation peculiar to a class, it is not our business to inquire; but we may fairly acknowledge to a respectful commiseration for a quiet respectable country gentleman who finds his neck committed to the keeping of one of these imperturbable, placid, yet utterly reckless adventurers.

The wind was getting up, and a heavy shower of mingled sleet and rain dashing in their faces, added considerably to the discomfort of the whole process.

"This can't last long," murmured Mr. Sawyer below his breath, and holding on vigorously to the side of the carriage the while, as they whirled fiercely through the obscurity, the rush of their career varied only by frequent jumps and bumps that threatened to jerk him clean out over the splash-board. He was not very far wrong in his calculations.

Their course lay along one of those field-roads so common in Leicestershire, where the track on a dark night is not easily distinguished from the adjacent ridge and furrow, and which, delightful to the equestrian for that very reason,

as no jealous fence prevents him diverging for a canter on to the springy pasture, are less convenient for carriages owing to the number of gates that delay the passage of the vehicle. They were now approaching the first of these obstacles to their course, and Crasher had not yet got a pull at his horses.

"It's open, I think," remarked the Honourable, peering into the darkness ahead, and endeavouring to moderate the pace without effect.

"I think *not!*" replied Mr. Sawyer, setting his teeth for a catastrophe,

Right again! Three more strides and they were into it!

A crackling smashing noise of broken woodwork—one or two violent bangs against the splash-board—a faint expostulation of "*Gently*, my lads" from the Honourable—a tremendous jolt against the post, which was torn up by the roots—and Mr. Sawyer found himself on his face and hands in an exceedingly wet furrow; a little stunned, a good deal confused, and feeling very much as if somebody had knocked him down, and he did not know who to be angry with.

As he rose and shook himself to ascertain that no bones were broken, much struggling

and groaning as of an animal in distress, mingled with weeping and lamentation from a human voice, smote on his ear. The former arose from Marathon, who couldn't get up, with the other horse and the pole and part of the carriage a-top of him: the latter from the Boy, who, frightened for the moment into a spurious sobriety, thus gave vent to his feelings of utter despondency and desolation.

"I thought the brute *could* jump timber," said a calm voice in the surrounding darkness. "Let us see: *here's* the carriage—*there* are the horses—and *that* must be the boy. Where are *you*, Sawyer?"

"Here!" answered our friend, coming forward, rubbing his elbows and knees, to discover if he was hurt; the Honourable, who had never abandoned his cigar, endeavouring to extricate the horses—a measure only to be accomplished by dint of cutting their harness—and to estimate the amount of damage, and the impossibility of putting in to refit.

Our friend set to work with a will. By their joint endeavours they succeeded at last in getting the hapless Marathon and his companion clear of the wreck. Both were obviously lamed and injured; the carriage, as far as could be made out in the darkness, broken all to pieces.

The Boy, after flickering up for a few minutes, had become again unconscious. As the old watchmen used to sing out, it was "Past one o'clock and a stormy morning!"

"Whereabouts are we?" asked Mr. Sawyer in dolorous accents, as he tried to persuade himself he ought to be thankful it was no worse. "Whereabouts are we? and what had we better do?"

"Over a hundred miles from London," answered the Honourable, "that's all I know about it. Holloaing, I suppose, would be no use—there can't be a house within hearing, and the fly has gone the other road. Have a cigar, old fellow! and just to keep the fun going, perhaps you wouldn't mind singing us a song?"

It was only under a calamity like the present that the Honourable condescended to be facetious.

Mr. Sawyer was on the verge of making an angry reply, when the sound of a horse's hoofs advancing with considerable rapidity changed it into a vigorous call for assistance.

"Hilli-ho! ho!" shouted Mr. Sawyer. "Hilli-ho! ho!" answered a jolly voice, as the hoofs ceased, and came clattering on again, denoting that the rider had pulled up to listen, and was coming speedily to help. "What's up

now ?" asked the jolly voice, in somewhat convivial accents, as an equestrian mass of drab and leggings, which was all that could be made out through the darkness, loomed indistinctly into the foreground. "What's up now, mates ? got the wrong end uppermost this turn, sure-lie."

"Come to grief at the gate," explained the Honourable. "Didn't go *quite* fast enough at it, Sawyer," he added, half reflectively, half apologetically to his friend.

"Why, it's Muster Crasher!" exclaimed the jolly voice in delighted tones. "Well, *to be* sure! Not the *first* gate neither, by a many—only to think of it! well, well!—But come, let's see what's the damage done—dear! dear! you'll never get home to-night. You must come up to my place, 'taint above a mile through the fields—we'll get you put up, nags and all, and send down for the trap first thing i' the morning. How lucky I was passing this way! Coming back from market, ye see, I'd just stopped to smoke a pipe with neighbour Mark down at The Holt, and was maken' for home in a hurry, 'cause it's rather past my time, you know, when I hear this gentleman a hollerin' murder! Up I comes and finds the ship overboard with a vengeance. What a start it is! Sure-lie!"

Thus moralising, and never leaving off talking for an instant, the jolly yeoman jumped off his horse, and lent his powerful assistance to clear away the wreck; shaking the Boy into life again with considerable energy. In a few minutes the four men, leading the two damaged carriage-horses, were stumbling and groping their way across the fields towards the new arrival's farm.

Ere they reached their destination the owner with considerate politeness introduced himself to our friend. "No offence, sir," said he, "my name's Trotter—Trotter of Trotter's Lodge, and that's my place where you see the light a shinin'—Mr. Crasher, he knows me *well*—think I've met *you* out a huntin'! more than once this season—allow me, sir—we'll have the missus up in no time, and a hearty welcome to you both!"

As Mr. Trotter thus hospitably concluded, he ushered his guests into a comfortable kitchen, where a tallow candle was still glimmering in its accustomed place. The master was obviously in the habit of coming home late; but that the practice was contrary to the rules of domestic discipline, Mr. Sawyer gathered from the accents of a shrill voice raised in tones of reproach from an upstairs dormitory.

"Trotter! Trotter!" exclaimed the voice;

unconscious of visitors, and proceeding apparently from beneath a considerable weight of bed-clothes, "is that you at last? It's too bad! It's nigh upon two o'clock. Mind you rake out the fire, and don't go spilling the candle-grease all about, as you come upstairs!"

Mr. Trotter, still perceptibly elevated, winked facetiously at his guests. "Get up, Margery!" he called out—"get up, I tell ye! make haste and come down. Never mind your night-cap. Here's two gentlemen come to see ye!" And with many apologies and repeated allusions to the substantive "keys" Mr. Trotter stirred up the fire, lit another candle, and proceeded upstairs to rouse his better-half.

In less time than you or I as a bachelor could believe it possible, a smiling dame made her appearance from above-stairs, with a neat morning cap over her comely head, and a bright rosy face, very different from the sallow hues of many a fine lady when first she wakes, blushing beneath it. That her petticoat was put on in a hurry, and her gown unfastened behind, was only what might be expected in such a rapid turn-out. These trifling drawbacks detracted not the least from the bustling hospitality with which she received her guests. It was only by the most pathetic entreaties that the Honour-

able dissuaded her from having a fire lighted in the best parlour, and extorted her permission for them to sit in the kitchen.

Dry slippers were soon provided for the guests. The horses inspected by the stable lantern were discovered not to be irremediably injured, though Marathon's chance was out for the steeple-chase, "if indeed" as his former and present owners remarked in a breath, though with different emphasis, "he ever had one!" The Boy was put to bed, where he might be heard snoring, all over the house. What Mr. Trotter called a "snack" was set on the table, consisting of a round of beef, a ham, some cold pork-pie, an Eddish cheese, and a few other trifles of a like nature, adapted for a late meal as being light and easy of digestion. Port and sherry were produced and declined in favour of huge steaming beakers of hot brandy-and-water. Arrangements were entered into for forwarding the two gentleman to Harborough in the farmer's gig "first thing to-morrow morning." Mr. Trotter produced a box of cigars and announced his intention of "making a night of it!"

A faint scream from his wife promised to a certain extent to modify the conviviality of the meeting. "She couldn't abear the sight of

blood," she said, with many excuses for her feminine susceptibility, and drew the company's attention to the personal appearance of Mr. Sawyer, which everybody had hitherto been too busy to observe, and which indeed presented a sufficiently ghastly aspect to excuse the good dame's reiterated assurances that it "had given her quite a turn."

A severe contusion on the eyebrow, accompanied by a cut extending to the cheek-bone, and which had covered one side of his face with dried blood, made him look much more damaged than he really was, and though kindly Mrs. Trotter quickly recovered her equanimity and brought him warm water, and vinegar, and balsam, and eventually plastered him up with about half-a-sheet of diachylon, she could not help shuddering during the operation, and seemed glad when it was over. Our farmers' wives of the present day are not quite as much accustomed to broken heads as bonny "Ailie," the helpmate of immortal Dandie Dinmont.

The borderer, however, could not have been more hospitably inclined than was the jovial Leicestershire farmer. Setting aside the difference of time and locality, they had indeed many qualities in common. The same love of hunting,

the same daring in the saddle, the same open-hearted hospitality, and tendency to push good-fellowship a little over the bounds of sobriety. The only difference perhaps was this, that Dandie Dinmont would have been getting up before Mr. Trotter was thinking of going to bed.

I am not going to recapitulate the sayings and doings of those jovial small-hours after Mrs. Trotter had betaken herself once more hopelessly to her couch. The Honourable Crasher, always a gentleman, though rather a torpid one, was equally at home with a duke and a drayman, perhaps more in his element with a hunting friend like Trotter than either. The good runs they recapitulated, the horses they remembered, the grey that was bought by Mr. G., and the chesnut that had carried Lord W. so well for years, the fences they had negotiated—nay, the very toasts they proposed and did justice to, would fill a chapter. It is sufficient to say that when Mr. Sawyer awoke in the best bedroom about sunrise the following morning, he had a racking head-ache, his mouth felt like the back of a Latin grammar, and the only distinct recollection with which he could charge his memory of the previous night's conversation was his host's recipe for making a young horse

a safe fencer, which he certainly did not then feel in a condition to adopt.

"If you've got a green horse as you're not very confident on at strong timber," said Mr. Trotter, about the fourth glass of brandy-and-water, "you tackle him *my* way. You take him out o' Sundays or any afternoon as you've nothing particular to do, and pick him out some real *stiff* ones. Give him two or three *good heavy falls*, and I'll warrant you'll have very little trouble afterwards. That's the way to make 'em *rise!*—aint it, Mr. Crasher?"

After such a night's amusement as I have described, gentlemen are apt to be later in the morning than they originally proposed.

Our belated travellers had intended getting back to their quarters at Harborough by eight or nine o'clock, there to make their toilets, discuss their breakfasts, and so proceed to covert methodically as usual, in time to meet Mr. Tailby's clipping pack at Carlton Clump. It was nine, however, before either of them was stirring, and then the hospitable Trotter, who was himself going to hunt, and who came in from shepherding as rosy and fresh as if he had never seen brandy-and-water in his life, would not hear of their going away without breakfast.

Altogether they did not get clear of Trotter's Lodge much before ten o'clock, and as they drove out of the farm-yard they had the mortification of seeing their entertainer mounted on his four-year-old ("Fancy riding a four-year-old after such a night!" thought Mr. Sawyer) on his way to the meet. "And we've got to go home and dress, and then come all this way back again," moralised the Honourable. "I say, Sawyer, I wish I could make this beggar go as fast as we did last night," and Crasher smiled at the recollection, as a man smiles who recalls some peaceful scene of his youth, or some good action which he will never find cause to repent.

This beggar, however, though a good farmer's nag enough, knew quite well that it wasn't his day for Market Harborough, and displayed great unwillingness to improve upon seven miles an hour in that direction. The chance of being in time faded away momently. Already they had overtaken several grooms with hunters; worse still, one or two early men on their hacks had overtaken *them*, and they had not yet struck into the high road. At last the sound of wheels behind them caused the old horse to quicken his pace. Not sufficiently so, however, to prevent the pursuing carriage from gaining on them

rapidly. Mr Sawyer looked back. Oh! for a gig umbrella! It was none other than Parson Dove driving his daughter to the meet, that young lady's very becoming costume denoting that it was her intention to join in the pleasures of the chase. Here was a predicament! To be detected by the queen of his affections, with whom he had parted at midnight, in all the correct decorum of evening costume, still in the same dress, so inappropriate at 10.30 A.M., bearing obvious tokens of having been out all night, and worse than all, with an inflamed countenance, blood-shot eyes, and a face half-eclipsed in plaister. Perdition! It was not to be thought of!

With the energy of despair he snatched the whip from the Honourable's astonished grasp, and applied it with such good will to the old horse's ribs, that the animal broke incontinently into a gallop and turned into the high road some fifty yards ahead of its pursuers, who would cross that thoroughfare directly, whereas Mr. Sawyer and its driver would follow its broad track to Harborough. "Cover me up!" exclaimed our friend to his laughing companion, as he crouched in the bottom of the carriage, under the scanty gig-apron, and devoutly hoped he had escaped recognition—"cover me up! I wouldn't be

seen in this plight by any of *that* family for a hundred pounds!" Nevertheless, he resolved, so to speak, to substantiate his *alibi* by swearing the Honourable to secrecy, and abstaining altogether for that day from the chase.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DOUGHTY DEEDS.

About this period there might have been—and indeed, by his intimates, there *was*—remarked an obvious change in the appearance, habits, and general demeanour of our friend. No longer dressed in the rough-and-ready style which had heretofore been at once his glory and his peculiarity, Mr. Sawyer now began to affect a strange refinement of costume, bordering on effeminacy. His boots were thinner and much tighter than of old: he turned his collars over his neckcloth, after the prevailing fashion, thereby imparting to his physiognomy an expression of romantic vacuity; anointed his head till it shone again; affected gloves on all occasions; and set up a ring. Altogether, his exterior was as symptomatic of his disorder as that of Benedict. Also he purchased, at a print-seller's over the way, a representation of a young person washing her feet in a stream, and purporting to be a "Highland Lassie," but of a

meretricious aspect which, it is only fair to state, is rarely to be observed amongst the Scottish mountaineers. It was one of those startling accidental likenesses to the lady of his affections, which a man must be as hard hit as Mr. Sawyer to detect. In the hunting-field, too, he adopted an ambitious style of riding, totally at variance with his previous quiet, straight-forward form; and a considerable interval of bad-scenting weather enabled him to distinguish himself to his heart's content. When hounds run best pace, horses have not wind for extraordinary exertions in the matter of fencing; and, moreover, such saltatory exploits as are out of the common way can be witnessed but by few, and those are completely engrossed in their own doings; but when the pack checks in every field, a man who chooses to single himself out by charging the ugliest bullfinches and the stiffest rails, either because he wants to attract attention, or to sell his horse, has every opportunity of showing up the latter, and calling down upon himself the animadversions of all true sportsmen. Our friend, with the two horses he bought from Mr. Varnish—both capital leapers—in addition to Hotspur and the grey, had no lack of material on which to flourish away in too close proximity to the chase. Charles Payne, though with a

strong fellow-feeling for "keenness," began to hate the sight of him, Mr. Tailby, to dread his appearance, as he would that of a black frost, and Lord Stamford to find that even *his* imperturbable good-humour might be exhausted at last.

What is to be expected, however, of a gentleman who has taken to repeating Montrose's well-known lines—

> "If doughty deeds my lady please,
> Right soon I'll mount my steed;
> And keen his lance, and strong his arm,
> That bears from me the meed;"

varied by the resolute sentiment—

> "He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch
> To win or lose it all!"

One or other of these romantic stanzas was continually on Mr. Sawyer's lips. After their enunciation, he was used to sigh deeply, shake his head, and light a cigar, which he would smoke vehemently for a quarter of an hour or so, in a brown study.

Our friend's reflections, however, were not wholly dipped in the roseate hues of hope. Stern misgivings would come across him, as to the imprudence of the career on which he had

embarked. He was spending a deal of money, that was the fact; and he had always, hitherto, been of a saving disposition, rather than otherwise. In the prosecution of his schemes against Miss Mexico, his outlay, indeed, had been principally in cheap jewellery and lavender-water—articles of fascination for the purchase of which he would have been handsomely reimbursed by that lady's thirty thousand pounds, *if he had got it.* But in the present case, not only was his extravagance much greater, but it is mere justice to state, that he had never weighed Miss Dove's fortune or the want of it in the balance with her attractions. The former flame had half a plum; the present might not have half-a-crown. Bah! what of that? Those eyelashes alone were worth all the money!

Nevertheless, a stud of horses, though consisting only of the modest number of four hunters and a hack, are not to be kept for nothing, more particularly when away from home. Independent of stable-rent, forage, subscriptions to hounds, and necessary *doucqurs* to different individuals, any man who has ever paid a groom's book, will bear witness to the extraordinary rapidity with which its different items accumulate. *Naphtha* alone is as dear as claret, and consumed with equal liberality;

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say nothing of the "honour and glory," and then sell the whole stud, and retire upon his laurels? Should fortune smile, and land him first past the post, it would be the proudest day of his life; and even in the event of failure, why, "If doughty deeds my lady please," &c.; and Miss Dove could not but look upon him with a more favourable eye, when he had worn her colours in the race.

Old Isaac must be taken into consultation. For the first time, his master rather shunned the glance of that keen, hard eye. He walked into the stable one evening, after hunting, and began to sound his servant on the important question.

"By-the-bye, Isaac," said he, in an off-hand tone, "they're talking of a steeple-chase here. Only amongst the gentlemen, you know: we shan't want much training. I think I should have a fair chance with Wood Pigeon?"

Isaac shook his head. "Well, sir," said he, *you* know best. Who's to ride?"

"Oh, I should ride him, myself, of course," replied his master, with a toss of the head that as much as said, "With such a jockey, he's sure to win." "Ride him myself, and do all I *know*, you may depend," he added facetiously.

Old Isaac reflected. "Have you ever ridden

sponges, rubbers, currycombs, and dandy-brushes require to be replaced with astonishing frequency; and, what with shoeing and removing, the blacksmith's bill is as long as his stalwart arm. When you add to all this an every-day dinner of the best, with champagne and claret *à discrétion* — if such a quality, indeed, can be said to exist in a bachelor party—you will not share Mr. Sawyer's surprise at discovering that his present expenditure far exceeded his calculations. The four hundred he had paid to Mr. Varnish for two horses completed a good round sum; and, for a minute or two, he thought he had better have remained at the Grange.

This last item, however, in his outlay, suggested to him a method by which he might combine fame with money-making, and, if Fortune stood his friend, have his season almost for nothing. The chesnut five-year-old, whom, out of compliment to Miss Dove, he had resolved to call "Wood Pigeon," was really a good nag. He was a quick and fine fencer; could gallop fast, and *go on*. Altogether, Mr. Varnish was not beyond the mark, when he described him to the purchaser as adapted for "safety, punctuality, and despatch." Why not put him into this steeple-chase they made such a fuss about, win a hatful of money in stakes, bets, &c., to

say nothing of the "honour and glory," and then sell the whole stud, and retire upon his laurels? Should fortune smile, and land him first past the post, it would be the proudest day of his life; and even in the event of failure, why, "If doughty deeds my lady please," &c.; and Miss Dove could not but look upon him with a more favourable eye, when he had worn her colours in the race.

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Old Isaac reflected. "Have you ever ridden

a steeple-chase?" he asked, after a moment's consideration.

Mr. Sawyer was obliged to admit that he never had.

"Well, then, *I have*," said the groom. "You don't know what it is. Such a blazin' pace through the fields! and such an owdacious scuffle at the fences! Nothin' but a professional can keep his head at that work; and *he* often gets it broke. Better not try it, master: better let it alone. They'll only make a fool of ye."

Mr. Sawyer waxed indignant. "That's my business," said he: "yours is to get the horse fit. I tell you I've entered him—Wood Pigeon, by Wapiti. He'll be first favourite the day of the race. Do you hear? I depend upon you to get him thoroughly fit."

Isaac scratched his head. "Fit!" he repeated. "Yes—I'll get the *horse* fit: you get the *rider*. If you *must* have a turn at it, take my advice, master. You get yourself in good wind; keep your head clear; jump off the moment the flag drops; never let his head go; and, above all, *sit still*."

After this, Isaac could never again be brought to open his mouth on the subject.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE BALL.

WHEN a man has not been provided by Nature with more than an average share of personal advantages, that same process of dressing for a ball *after* a bachelor's dinner-party is an affair of considerable trouble and dissatisfaction. To devote those minutes, that are wont to pass so pleasantly in the enjoyment of conviviality or repose to the cares of the toilet, is in itself a sufficient infliction; but the contrast is rendered all the more aggravating by abortive efforts to eradicate the effluvia of tobacco-smoke, to disguise the appearance of satiety, not to say repletion, attendant on four courses and a dessert, with champagne and claret at discretion, and to achieve that general aspect of light and airy gaiety which even middle-aged gentlemen of spherical proportions consider most captivating in the eyes of the fair.

All these difficulties had Mr. Sawyer to encounter on the night of the Harborough Ball.

Yes, the important event had arrived at last, after much discussion by stewards and lady patronesses, and general differences of opinion amongst all concerned. After protestations from some that they could by no means fill their houses, and assurances from others that nothing would induce them to travel such distances by night in bad weather, and declarations from all that, for their own part, they voted the whole thing a bore, the day was at length fixed, the musicians engaged, the supper ordered, and the room prepared.

"It was to be a capital ball," said one, "comprising the *élite* of three counties, and at least as many beautiful *débutantes*." "There would be nobody there," vowed another, "but the M. F. H., and the M P., and old Mrs. Half-caste, with a bevy of the towns-people." The room would be cold, prophesied the malcontents; the supper scanty, the roads slippery, and the moon obscured. Miss Cecilia Dove, in talking the matter over with her mamma, inclined first to one, and then the other of these opinions; supporting each in turn with vigour and tenacity. Under any circumstances, however, she had determined to go.

Behold Mr. Sawyer then, in his little smoky bedroom, struggling into a white neckcloth, about 10 P.M., and contemplating a pale face

and heavy eyes; the unattractive appearance of which he could not wholly attribute to the bad glass which adorned his dressing-table. He was nervous, too, was our friend John Sawbridge Sawyer—unquestionably nervous. Of all nights in his life this was the one when he would fain have borrowed, if he could, the exterior of another hunting-man, a very different looking person, whom painters strive to represent as worthy to be the Queen of Beauty's choice, in their embodiment of the hapless loves of Venus and Adonis. Alas! Mr. S. could not conceal from himself that he was anything but a good-looking fellow.

Nevertheless, a plain exterior, like a bad farm, must equally be cultivated at the proper season. Dress works wonders, and the tailor, if you employ Poole, doubtless helps to make the man. Like Brummel, our friend spoilt a good many white neckcloths before he effected *the* desired tie. At last, however, he got it to his liking, swung himself into a roomy dress-coat—scarlet, with silk lining—and proceeded, not without trepidation, to the scene of action.

Is there any penalty or disgrace attached to the solecism of being earlier than one's neighbours at ball, concert, or other public occasion of festivity? It is wonderful what pains people

will take to avoid this appearance of over-punctuality. I cannot call to mind any occasion on which I have thus had the room *entirely* to myself; nor did I ever meet anyone who would confess that he had enjoyed this monopoly of vacuity. And yet somebody must arrive first! I wonder how that desolate one employs the long leaden moments. Does he wander about with hands in his pockets, trying to look as if he expected something, and scanning the decorations with critical *sang froid!* Does he fraternise with the musicians, who, drawn up in a row, must present, indeed, a formidable array of eyes to a person of moderate apprehensions, and win their eternal good-will by performing a *pas seul* to their voluntary strains? or does he give way to a cowardly despair, and, retreating in disorder, retire incontinently to bed? Probably not the latter, or the ball would never begin.

Mr. Sawyer had none of this to confront single-handed. Loitering about the cloak-room door, he came upon Struggles, Brush, Savage, and Co.; all equally averse with himself to plunge prematurely into the festive scene, and was greeted by the conclave, from whom he had parted about an hour previously, with a boisterous cordiality born of their potations.

"He's *meant!*" said one, talking of our friend as if he were a race-horse in strong training, whom each had backed heavily to win. "Got up to the nines!" exclaimed another, scanning him from top to toe, as an adjutant scans a recruit. "Hang it! Sawyer, you've done it to-night!" laughed a third; "they won't let *you* out of this alive!" And Mr. S., who rather flattered himself the general effect was favourable, did not quite know whether to be pleased with their approbation or to take huff at their familiarity. Meanwhile carriages were setting down with increasing frequency. The clatter was quite alarming in the paved streets of the little country town; the steam of horses almost obscured the carriage-lamps, and sweet little satin-slippered feet stepped daintily from inside, over an interregnum of wet straw, on to a soppy foot-cloth. When ankles are neatly turned, but not otherwise, it is surprising what a deal of holding-up is required by the compressible and expansive *crinoline*. Warm greetings and affectionate pressures of the hand were exchanged between such swains as were lucky enough to intercept them and their own peculiar damsels in the passage to the cloak-room, whither the ladies betook themselves forthwith, there to leave their becoming and coquettish little *bur-*

nouses ere they shook out their canvas and got under sail in all the splendour of full dress.

Mammas looked approvingly at their bridling daughters, as the latter tripped into the ball-room before them—mammas, the very counterpart of those blooming beauties, had you rolled up two or three into one, but fair-shouldered, brown-haired, and comely yet, as English matrons are, up to a very uncertain period. Papas, with white gloves and red faces, slapped each other's backs, and talked about yesterday's gallop. The musicians struck up the prettiest waltz of the last season but one; Major Brush, with unexampled temerity, dashed into the enchanted ring with Lady Barbara Blazer in his arms; Bob Blazer followed suit with flirting Miss Tiptoes. A whirling maze of tulle, and wreaths, and sparkling gems, and perfumed floating tresses pervaded the magic circle; louder pealed the cornet-à-piston, brighter glanced the eyes, faster flew the dancers, the top of the room began to fill, and the ball might now be said to have fairly begun.

It is only your habitual ball-goer, however, who can thus, like some consummate swimmer, dash in with a header and strike out at once into the flood. Less experienced performers may be excused for shivering awhile on the

brink. Shy gentlemen congregating round the doorway fitted their gloves on with tedious accuracy, looking over their collars meanwhile at their future partners, with an air of melancholy defiance; the weaker-minded ones informing each other confidentially that it was "going to be a capital ball!" The ranks of these waverers thinned perceptibly though, as the dance wore on, and Mr. Sawyer, who did not waltz, found himself ere long stranded high and dry at the top of the room amongst the grandees; a little bewildered, truly, and lost in such a crowd of strangers, but greatly sustained, nevertheless, by Hope and Bourdeaux.

These stimulants, as might be expected, waned simultaneously. Fresh arrivals blocked the doorway; and still she didn't come! Not she, indeed! Catch Miss Cissy doing anything half so green as arriving early or staying late. No, no; if you want to be sought after, ladies, you must be sparing of your presence and economical of your smiles. There is no dog so obedient as the one you keep sitting up on his hind legs, to beg for a crumb of biscuit at a time.

Mr. Sawyer was in despair. As a stranger, however, he was presented to the grandees, and found himself, he scarcely knew how, engaged

to dance "The Lancers" with Lady Barbara Blazer, a formidable beauty, of dashing, not to say, overwhelming manners, and who attributed to extraordinary forwardness, for which she rather liked him, our friend's confused and half-unconscious request that she would favour him with her hand.

Now dancing was not Mr. Sawyer's *forte*, and he had never before attempted "The Lancers." It is no wonder, then, that the intricacies of that measure should have utterly bamboozled him, or that he should have set to the wrong people, got in everybody's way, and made himself supremely ridiculous. Add to this, that in the midst of the most difficult manœuvre, when, hunting over the set for his own partner in vain, he caught Cissy Dove's eyes fixed upon him with an expression of malicious amusement; and it is needless to specify that his discomfiture was complete: Cissy Dove looking radiant as a Peri. Oh, after that, it was all magic and moonshine. Lady Barbara never alluded to him subsequently as anything but "the poor queer man I met at Harborough;" and that magnificent dame's opinion of his intellectual attainments I had rather not be compelled to declare.

Mr. Sawyer was no sooner released from his self-imposed penance than he flew to the side of

his charmer, whom he found, as might be expected, hemmed in by Mamma and Papa, surrounded by a bevy of female acquaintances, and receiving the homage of one or two elaborate dandies of considerable calibre and pretension.

She shook hands with him, however, across young Vainhopes; after which he was forced to fall back upon Parson Dove, whom he accosted with great cordiality and affection.

A man never shows to such disadvantage as in the presence of his ladye-love. How many a Hercules have we not seen holding her silks for Omphale; his lion-front looking sheepish—not to say asinine; his strength degenerated to clumsiness; his whole exterior denoting helpless subjection and dismay! Mr. Sawyer was no exception to the general rule. He pulled at his neckcloth; twitched his gloves on and off; looked at his boots; listened to the Parson's platitudes, without hearing a word; finally, made a desperate plunge, and entreated Miss Dove to dance the next quadrille with him.

Miss Dove was engaged.

"Well, the one after that."

Miss Dove glanced at a tiny list of running horses, so to speak, that she held in her hand.

"Dear me; she was engaged for that too!"

Our friend was disgusted beyond measure: he fell back with a mortified bow, and resolved he would not speak to her for the rest of the night. It would be a poor pastime to watch the dancers from a remote corner without participating in their amusements; nevertheless he entered at once on the self-inflicted penance. The ball, however, went on none the less gaily for his abstinence. Lady Barbara nearly swept him off his legs in a whirlwind of crinoline as she waltzed by him at the rate of forty miles an hour. The Tiptoes and the Vainhopes and the rest seemed as unconscious of his presence as if he had never left The Grange, and Cissy Dove, herself dancing with a succession of dandies, each more resplendent, and more taken up with himself than another, never glanced but once in the direction of her disappointed swain. That single look, however, had in it something of a pleading expression, that found its way through the embroidered plaits of Mr. Sawyer's best shirt-front, and mollified the stern heart beneath. It brought him out of his corner; it induced him to think more favourably of life in general, and of the Scotch quadrilles, now striking up merrily, in particular; it even prompted him to select the youngest Miss Hare, a blushing virgin making her first appearance in public, as his

partner; and, lastly, tempted him to request Miss Dove and her cavalier, no less a swell than Bob Blazer, to be their *vis-à-vis*.

Cissy watched him pretty narrowly during the dance. Ladies, as we all know, have the abnormal faculty of seeing without looking. I am bound to confess that his dialogue with little Polly Hare was of so harmless a nature as could not have excited the ghost of an apprehension in the most jealous disposition. It proceeded something in this wise.

Mr. Sawyer—with his whole attention absorbed in the lady opposite—"Are you fond of dancing?"

The youngest Miss Hare—"Oh! very!"

Mr. S.—"What a pretty room this is!"

Miss H.—"Yes! very."

Mr. S.—"The music is remarkably good for a country band."

Miss H.—"Oh! very."

[Grand Round strikes up, much to their joint relief, and promises to put a speedy termination to the solemnity.]

But in the revolutions of this highly-exciting pastime there is one figure which admits of the gentleman and lady opposite saying nearly three words to each other; and it is needless to insist on the necessity of condensing

as much meaning as possible into so short a sentence.

"Why so cross?" said Miss Cissy, as she approached her adorer at this propitious moment; and, although Mr. Sawyer had neither presence of mind nor opportunity to make an appropriate reply, he looked like a different individual henceforth, and almost forgot to return his little partner, none the worse for her excursion, to the maternal wing.

Little did Mr. Sawyer dream, as she thanked him with her demure curtsey, how that sly puss, who had been indeed the life and soul of the school-room she had just left, would act the whole scene over again that night in her dormitory, for the edification of three elder sisters and a Swiss maid; how she would mimic to the life his stiff shy manner and preoccupied demeanour —nay, make her very draperies stick out like the square tails of his coat. In virtue of her sex, the little minx detected his secret, and saw through him at a glance, though she was but sixteen. He thought it was very good of him to dance with her, and she was making a study and a character of him the whole time! Dear! dear! how little we know of them! Happy the man who wraps himself in a waterproof garment of vanity; who is determined to ignore the reflec-

tion, that the smile he resolves to accept as approval may be nothing better than derision after all; who leaves them to their own devices, and thanks his stars that he has served his apprenticeship and is "out of his time!"

A quadrille with Miss Dove put everything to rights. She seemed resolved to make amends, and she did it so prettily! She gave him her fan to hold, and her bouquet to smell, and asked his opinion of the different beauties, and smiled upon him and petted him, till her dancing-bear was in thorough subjection once more. He almost made up his mind he would propose to her in the tea-room. An eligible spot for the purpose, as it was likely to contain about fifty couples wedged together in the closest possible proximity! He could hardly be mistaken, he thought, this time; yet a cold shudder crept over him as he recollected Miss Mexico. If this business should have the same termination, he felt he had lived long enough. He would go and drown himself in the Whissendine, or retire to the mountain fastnesses of Wales, there to hunt with the Plinlimmon harriers and that united pack, the glory of three districts, whereof no mortal tongue can pronounce the names.

He drew her nervously with him towards the tea-room. Ere they reached its entrance they

were intercepted by young Vainhopes—all gloves, and studs, and curls, and chains, and smiles.

"*Our* waltz at last, Miss Dove," said he, with a captivating grin; "thought you'd forgotten me; quite in despair; waited all the evening." And he carried her off, amidst a running fire of such complimentary phrases as constituted his usual conversation with the fair, and which they were quite willing to accept at their real value.

It needs little knowledge of chemistry to be aware that cold water poured on hot iron generates steam. I think Mr. Sawyer showed his sense in retiring to blow his off, with one or two convivial spirits, who finished the evening in the Honourable Crasher's rooms on cigars and brandy-and-water; the latter gentleman, who had asked Lady Barbara to dance, and then forgotten all about it, having made an early retreat to those comfortable quarters.

Here we may leave these choice spirits to their potations. Mr. Sawyer, as his friends remarked, was noisier than usual, and mixed his glass remarkably strong. He did not feel inclined to go to bed, but was quite determined not to return to the ball. Perhaps, without knowing it, he could not have adopted a more judicious resolution.

Cissy looked for him everywhere. She even excused herself from dancing, more than once, in expectation of his return—meaning, however, to pay him off to some purpose when he *did* come back. But even at the cloak-room door there was no Mr. Sawyer. Bob Blazer got her shawl, and Savage called the carriage, and Vainhopes put her into it. Yet Cissy felt out of spirits and out of humour. Though she declared she had never enjoyed a ball so much, her mamma thought she was very silent all the way home; and she took her bed-room candle and retired up-stairs the very moment they arrived at the Rectory.

It was a "new sensation" to Miss Dove, not to have everything entirely her own way.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RACE.

With many men, and those not the least dashing and brilliant horsemen, courage is apt to be very much a question of caloric: their pluck rises and falls with the thermometer. When the mercury stands at 45 or 50 deg. they negotiate with pleasure the largest and most dangerous of fences; at a few degrees above freezing they are content to seek humbly for the gaps or weak places, and a gate, instead of being jumped, is lifted off its hinges; whilst at 32 deg. the turnpike-road has invincible attractions, and is not to be deserted under any provocation.

Granting such meteorological affinities, it is needless to observe that a steeple-chase is usually contested in the bitterest possible weather, with a cutting east wind.

The great event at Market Harborough was no exception to this general rule, and the important day was ushered in by about as

unpleasant a morning as any gentleman could desire for the purpose of exposing himself in a silk jacket and racing leathers about the thickness of kid gloves. Frequent storms swept across the sky, bearing with them heavy showers of mingled sleet and hail, which stung the unprotected face like pins and needles. It was a bad day to see; a bad day to hear; above all, a bad day to ride.

Struggles observed: "It was lucky they were not out hunting."

Behold, then, between the storms, under a delusive gleam of sunshine, about two P.M., half-a-dozen canvas booths erected in a large, sloppy grass field, within a few miles of Market Harborough. Behold, congregated around the same, a motley group of tramps, list-sellers, vagrants of every description, gipsies, and card-sharpers. Behold a few jolly yeomen and farmers, pulling their wet collars over their mouths to concentrate the fumes of that last glass of brandy, and poking their horses about in the crowd, to stumble ever and anon over certain mysterious ropes, placed, for no apparent purpose, in everybody's way. Behold two or three carriages of the gentlefolks herding together, as if rather ashamed of their company, and a pretty face or two, amongst which you may recognise that of

Miss Dove, a little paler than usual, peeping out from under a multiplicity of wrappers, with an air of vague astonishment, the owner having been on the ground for more than an hour, and nothing done yet. Behold also Mr. Tiptop, galloping his master's best hack as fast as the animal can lay legs to the ground, in the direction of a dripping marquee, near which there is a little knot of gentlemen in waterproof clothing, who seem to constitute an assemblage of their own. Let us lift the dank, heavy sailcloth, and peep in.

Mr. Sawyer, paper-booted, silk-capped, and clad in a gorgeous raiment of plum-colour, with a face, too, on which the cares of an empire seem to sit, is "spread-eagled" in a weighing machine, vainly trying to keep his spurs off the wet straw, and to nurse on his uncomfortable lap, a saddle, a bridle, a breastplate, a martingale, five pounds of dead weight, and a whip, of which the top is ornamented with an elaborate and massive design. He is what he calls "weighing in;" and the process appears to be troublesome, not to say painful.

Behind him, and preparing for the same ordeal, is Major Brush, tucking himself and his under-garment, with considerable difficulty, into a pair of extremely tight leathers, he having

selected this most inappropriate shelter as his dressing-room.

The Honourable Crasher, with a large cigar in his mouth, is watching the proceedings vacantly, having to go through them in his turn; and a quiet, clean-shaved man, with a keen eye, who is prepared for the fray, but has wisely wrapped himself up once more in a long great coat, is busy with his betting-book. This worthy, who answers to the name of Stripes, has come a hundred miles to ride Mr. Savage's bay horse Luxury. Judging from the use he makes of his pencil, he seems to think he has a good chance of coming in first. Already there has been a wrangle as to whether he is qualified to ride as a gentleman; but the only argument against his pretensions to that title being the superiority of his horsemanship, the objection has been suffered to fall through.

The stewards will have an easier task than they expected. The race has not filled well, and will probably not produce half-a-dozen starters. As the Harborough tradespeople say, "it is a poor affair." Nevertheless, a deal of money has been wagered on it; and the devoted few are resolved to do their best.

Under the lee of an outhouse—the only one, by the way, within a mile—old Isaac is walking

Wood Pigeon carefully up and down, with his usual imperturbable demeanour. It is hard to make out what he thinks of the whole affair—whether he esteems it an unheard-of piece of tom-foolery, or looks upon it as a means of making an addition to his yearly wages. Under either contingency, he has done his duty by Wood Pigeon. Beneath all that clothing, the horse is as fine as a star; and even Mr. Varnish could not find fault with his condition. That worthy, however, is gone to ride a horse of Napoleon the Third's, at Chantilly, and is supposed by his admirers to be staying with the Emperor at Compiègne, for the event.

Mr. Tiptop and old Isaac are barely on speaking terms.

Presently, a heavier shower than any of its predecessors sweeps across the scene; and the only steward who can be got to attend, not seeing the fun of waiting any longer, has given the gentlemen-riders a hint that, if they are not mounted and ready in ten minutes, he will go home to luncheon. The threat creates considerable confusion and dismay. "Lend me a fourteen-pound saddle!" exclaims one; "Where are my girths?" shouts another; "I can't ride him without a martingale!" groans a third; "Where's my whip? and has any one seen my

horse ?" asks a fourth : and, for a time, things look less like a start than before. Nevertheless, the steward is known to be a man of his word ; and his announcement produces the desired effect at last.

Let us take advantage of Parson Dove's kind offer, and, placing ourselves on the box of his carriage, abstract our attention from his pretty daughter inside, and take a good view of the proceedings.

A preliminary gallop, in the wind's eye, with a sharp sleet driving in their faces, prepares the heroes for their agreeable task. Flags mark out the extent and the direction of "danger's dark career." Starting in this large grass field, they jump a hedge and ditch into yonder less extensive pasture, fenced by double posts and rails, which, successfully negotiated, brings them, after a succession of fair hunting leaps, to The Brook. Fourteen feet of water is a tolerable effort for a horse, everywhere but in print ; and as the weather will probably have wet the jockeys through before they arrive at this obstacle, it matters little whether they go in or over. After that, the fences are larger and more dangerous, an exceedingly awkward "double" enclosing the next field but one to the run-in.

The Parson thinks the ground injudiciously selected. As he had no voice in the matter, it is as well to agree with him. Mrs. Dove's attention is a little distracted by the hamper with the luncheon; and Cissy hopes fervently that "nobody will be hurt."

Let us count the starters. One, two, three, four, five, six. Mr. Crasher's Chance, blue, and white sleeves (owner); Major Brush's Down-upon-'em, "gorge de pigeon," crimson cap (owner); Mr. Savage's Luxury, scarlet, and black cap (Mr. Stripes); Mr. Brown's Egg Flip, white (owner); Mr. Green's Comedy, by Comus, black and all black (Mr. Snooks); and lastly, Mr. Sawyer's Wood Pigeon, plum-colour, and blue cap (owner).

The latter's appearance excites considerable admiration, as he takes his breathing canter. Wood Pigeon is a remarkably handsome animal; and Mr. Sawyer, at a little distance, looks more like a jockey than any of them, with the exception of the redoubtable Stripes.

Old Isaac goes up to his master for a few last words before the flag drops. "You mind the double comin' in," says the wary old dodger. "Close under the tree 's the best place, 'cause there 's no holes in the bank; and, pray ye now, *do ye sit still!*"

A faint exclamation from Miss Dove proclaims they are off. Out with the double-glasses! From the carriage, we can see them the whole way round.

One, two, three! They fly the first fence in a string, Chance leading. The Honourable means to make running all through. Wood Pigeon is a little rash; but Mr. Sawyer handles him to admiration. He goes in and out of the double posts and rails like a pony.

This difficulty disposes of Mr. Snooks, who lets Comedy by Comus out of his hand, falls, and never appears again.

The others increase the pace, as the lie of the ground takes them a little down-hill towards the brook. As they near it, you might cover them with a sheet; but, while the whole increase their velocity, Chance and Wood Pigeon, the latter followed closely by Mr. Stripes on Luxury, single themselves out from the rest. All three get over in their stride; and a faint shout rises from the crowd on the distant hill. Egg Flip jumps short, and remains on the further bank, with his back broken, the centre of a knot of foot-people, who congregate round him in a moment, from no one knows where. Down-upon-'em struggles in and out again, striding over the adjacent water meadow as if

full of running; but Brush is far more blown than his horse. His cap is off, his reins are entangled, he has lost a stirrup, and it is obvious that the Major's chance is out.

The race now lies between the leading three; and Crasher, who has great confidence in Chance's pedigree and stoutness, forces the running tremendously. He and Sawyer take their leaps abreast, the latter riding very quietly and carefully, mindful of old Isaac's advice, to "sit still." Luxury is waiting close upon them.

"That fellow has been at the game before," remarks Parson Dove, eyeing Mr. Stripes through his glasses, and struck with admiration at the artistic manner in which that gentleman pulls his horse together for the ridge-and-furrow.

The Parson is not far wrong. Few professionals would care to give Mr. Stripes the usual allowance of five pounds.

Thus they near the "double"—the last obstacle of any importance. It consists of two ditches, and a strong staked-and-bound fence on a bank. No horse can fly it all in his stride, after galloping nearly four miles. Perhaps that is the reason why Stripes, who knows he is on a *quick* one as well as fast one, shoots a little to the front, and comes at it at such an awful pace,

seducing his two adversaries, by the force of example, into the same indiscretion. Crasher, who never "loses his stupidity," as he calls his presence of mind, diverges for a rail that he spies where the ditch is narrowest, takes the chance of breaking that or being killed, and going at it forty miles an hour, smashes it like paper, and succeeds, as Chance rises not an inch, in covering both ditches at a fly. He lands almost abreast of Luxury, who has struck back at the fence with the rapidity and activity of a cat.

Mr. Sawyer, though remembering the place under the tree, dare not pull his horse off enough, lest he should lose too much ground, and Wood Pigeon, who is a little blown, attempting to do it all at once, lands with both fore-feet in the further ditch, chucks his rider into the field before him, and then rolls over the plum-coloured jacket in an extremely uncomfortable form. The horse rises, looking wild and scared; not so the rider: "He's down!" exclaim the crowd; but their attention is so taken up by a slashing race home between Crasher and Stripes, in which the former is out-ridden by the latter, and beaten by half-a-length on the post, that probably no one present but Miss Dove knew who it was that was down. As the

plum-colour still lay motionless, poor Cissy turned very pale and sick, and then began to cry.

Our friend was not dead, however, very far from it—only stunned, and his collar-bone broken. He recovered sufficiently to be taken past the Doves' carriage before Cissy had done drying her eyes; and although he was not able to join the dinner-party at his hotel, with which the day's sports concluded, and at which an unheard-of quantity of champagne was consumed, I have been credibly informed that he partook of luncheon within less than a fortnight at Dovecote Rectory, and was seen afterwards with his arm in a sling, taking a tête-à-tête walk to look for violets with the daughter of the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MATCH.

LOUNGING past Tattersall's one baking day in June, I had the good fortune to encounter Mr. Savage, apparently as busily employed as myself in the agreeable occupation of doing nothing. If you have ever been addicted to the fascinating pursuit of fox-hunting, you will understand how, even in London, the presence of a fellow-enthusiast is as a draught of water to a pilgrim in the desert sand. Linking arms, we turned unconsciously down the yard, and were soon mingling with the motley crowd who fill that locality on a sale day.

"Any horses you know to be sold here?" I asked, as we stepped into the office for a list.

"None but Sawyer's," answered Mr. Savage; "pretty good nags, too. I shall bid for one of them myself!"

Then we fell to talking of the grass countries and their delights, of the different rumours

afloat as to this master and that, how one county was to change hands, and another to be hunted six days a week, how the young Squire was getting keen, and the old Lord was growing slack, and how, under all conditions, the foxes were not so stout nor the sport so brilliant as it used to be. Lastly, we got upon the doings of our Market Harborough friends. Struggles was as jolly as ever, nothing changed, putting on weight, and looking for weight-carriers every day. Brush? Oh, Brush had lost a "cracker" on the Derby, *would* back "Skittle-Sharper," though Savage warned him not, and had been obliged to go on full pay. What of the Honourable Crasher? He had appeared in London as usual, and was gone for a little change of air to New York! I pictured to myself how enchanted the "Broadway Swells" would be with Crasher's superfine languor and general debility; how they would worship him as the "real article" in dandyism; how they would quote his sayings and imitate his nonchalance, and how favourable a contrast such an imitation would offer to their normal state of hurry and confusion, particularly about dinner time. But I wondered what could have taken Crasher there, of all places in the world. Then I mentioned that I had seen nothing

of my old friend Sawyer for a considerable period, and indeed had received no intelligence of his doings since the steeple-chace, in which he got so bad a fall.

"Haven't you heard?" exclaimed Savage. "Why, Sawyer's married, poor fellow! Married pretty Cissy Dove, that flirting girl, who used to look so well on a chesnut horse. You must remember Cissy Dove. Why, there's the very horse going up to the hammer with Sawyer's lot. I suppose she's given up riding now—got something else to do."

Sure enough there was the late Miss Dove's exceedingly clever palfrey, looking fat and in good case, as horses always do when they are "to be sold without reserve." There was Wood Pigeon, twice his hunting size. There was the brown and the grey, and one I didn't know, and Jack-a-Dandy himself, submitting, not very patiently, to the attentions of a villanous-looking man in dirty-white cords, who was coughing him and punching him, and feeling his legs, and narrowly escaped having his brains knocked out for his pains.

I turned to moralise with Savage, but he was gone. You never can speak to anybody in London for more than five minutes together, and I walked out of the yard musing upon man's

weakness and woman's power, on the uncertain tenure by which a bachelor holds his freedom, on the common lot, and how nobody is safe. "I never would have believed it of Sawyer," methought, as I turned meditatively into Piccadilly; but then I did not know he had been out gathering violets in seductive company, with his arm in a sling.

Turning into Sam's Library, with intent to secure a stall at the French play for my niece, I politely awaited the leisure of a very smartly dressed lady examining the plan of the Opera-House, and bending studiously over the same at the counter. Her cavalier, a thick-set man, attired with considerable splendour, was engrossed in a volume which he had taken up, as it would appear, to wile away a long and tedious interval of consultation between his companion and the shopman. The lady looked up first, and under her little white bonnet with its innocent bride-like lilies-of-the-valley, I discovered a pretty dark-eyed face, such as ere this has tempted many a son of Adam, forgetful of his progenitors' mishaps, into the commission of matrimony.

"An't you ready yet?" she inquired, addressing her cavalier with just the slightest possible

turn of asperity, to give piquancy, as it were, to the dregs of the honey still remaining from the moon. "An't you ready?" she repeated in a sharper key, perceiving the student so engrossed as to be unconscious of her observation. This time there was more of the vinegar and less of the honey, and he started to "attention" forthwith.

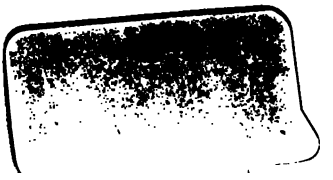
"Quite ready, dearest," was the reply in the most submissive of tones, as he laid his book down upon the counter, and disclosed to my astonished view the features of my old friend John Standish Sawyer.

Our greeting was of the most cordial. I was presented in due form to the bride, who vouchsafed me so sweet a smile as made me wonder less than ever at Mr. Sawyer's subjugation. After putting her into the hired Brougham that was in waiting for them, he lingered for a moment to tell me of his late-won happiness. "The horses go up to-day," said he: "and I cannot affirm that I am sorry for it. With such an attraction at home, a man don't want to go out hunting. I don't think somehow I shall ever care to ride to hounds again!"

As I turned back into the shop, the book my friend had been studying so assiduously lay upon

the counter. I took it up with a pardonable curiosity. It was the "Life of Thomas Assheton Smith, Esq."

I shall expect to hear of Sawyer's buying two or three hunters yet, before November.

THE END.

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